

BROKEN IDOLS: MIGRATION, GLOBALIZATION, AND CULTURAL  
CHANGE IN HONDURAS

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# BROKEN IDOLS: MIGRATION, GLOBALIZATION, AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN HONDURAS

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This is an ethnographic study of a coffee-growing community in Honduras, which was in the midst of a transition to economic reliance on migration to the United States from 2001 to 2004, when field research was conducted by the author. The author focuses on the origins and contemporary dynamics of Honduran emigration, and explores the impact of emigration on local society and culture. He argues that migration has led to a profound sense of confusion within a single community, identified by the pseudonym of "La Quebrada." In this town, migration is generally described in negative terms, and migrants are often seen as the cause of socioeconomic crisis, rather than its victims.

The author describes two local responses to emigration in La Quebrada: the rise of evangelical churches and the establishment of a fair trade coffee cooperative. Evangelical churches offer solutions to many of the social problems caused by emigration, and fair trade production offers an economic alternative to migration for coffee farmers. He draws a parallel between local criticisms of migrants as the source of social decline, the explanations of social crisis offered by the evangelical churches, and the philosophy of fair trade. In each case, people express concern about the manner in which their community has been integrated into the global economy, but they believe that individual behavior is the only viable source of social reform. This

emphasis on the individual, abstracted from social totalities, limits the political potential of these movements. The author concludes that these movements articulate a sense of popular anxiety over the community's future, and a desire to refashion society for the collective good. However, the forms that these popular responses have taken is based on a belief that no political institution can mediate between the individual and the global market. The tendency to conceptualize sociopolitical reform in individualized terms, he argues, reflects macro-level cultural changes that have occurred around the globe in the past twenty years.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daniel Reichman was born in Mt. Chase, Maine in 1976. He was educated in the public schools of Sharon, Massachusetts, and he attended Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He received bachelors degrees in anthropology and Spanish in 1998. At Franklin and Marshall, he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and captain of the men's cross country team. He began graduate studies at Cornell University in August of 2000, after working in business. In 2001, he received a Graduate Research Fellowship from the National Science Foundation.

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## Preface

The pages that follow are the result of ten months of field research conducted in Honduras between 2001 and 2003. Virtually all of my time in the field was spent in a town which I will call La Quebrada, a rural community of 4,500 people in west-central Honduras.<sup>1</sup> Readers familiar with Spanish will note that the name "La Quebrada" means both "the stream" and "the broken article." I have chosen this pseudonym for two reasons, one descriptive and the other evocative. The town is located high in the mountains near the source of one of Honduras' major rivers, and it is bisected by several streams that eventually drain into the Caribbean, which lies approximately one hundred miles to the north. Therefore, "the stream" describes a notable geographic feature of the community.

More importantly, the sense of being broken implied by *La Quebrada* reflects the period of crisis in which the community finds itself, a motif which will appear throughout the present work. The title of this work is an obvious allusion to this motif, and I intend for the image of "broken idols"--literally iconoclasm--to be taken in two senses. In one sense, "broken idols" refers to rejection of Catholic religious symbols by the town's growing Protestant population. Metaphorically, it refers to the replacement of an old social order with a new one. As the coffee economy in La Quebrada is replaced by dependence on wages earned by migrants working in the United States, the "idols" of a previous generation lose ground to new ones. On a theoretical level, social theorists in the postmodern era have engaged in many sorts of

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<sup>1</sup> Honduras is divided into thirteen *departamentos*, analogous to U.S. states. Each *departamento* is composed of *municipios*, which are smaller administrative units equivalent to counties. La Quebrada is the county-seat of its *municipio*. The *municipio* is divided into *pueblos*, *aldeas*, and *caseríos* (towns, villages, and homesteads).

idol-smashing, claiming that postmodernity and globalization have ushered in a new historical era that requires new theoretical models. This work is a product of the current moment of iconoclasm in anthropology.

I regret the loss of specificity and historical detail that is an inescapable consequence of the use of pseudonyms (Wolfe 2002). I have invented names in order to protect the identity of many townspeople who are involved in illegal activities such as human smuggling and undocumented immigration. The only real names included in this work belong to historical figures, scholars, and religious leaders. Some readers may find the names unusual, but they are all names that actually exist in La Quebrada, put into combinations of my own making. I have tried to capture the tone and rhythms of life in La Quebrada without giving too much away. I have made my best effort to provide a picture that can be used for comparison and interpretive context, but I apologize to those readers familiar with Honduras who will no doubt wish for more fine-grained detail about my research site in order to evaluate my findings.

Despite my best efforts, Honduran specialists will be able to determine the community in which this study is based. It would be impossible to write an ethnography without providing some specific details that a determined reader could use to identify the real name of La Quebrada. Even the most well-covered tracks can be followed by a skilled sleuth. I ask that future commentators respect the standard of privacy to which I strive in this work, and refrain from publicly revealing the town's name or identifying the real names of the people described here.

### *Notes on Method*

This work is based on three periods of research in La Quebrada: one month in 2001, eight months in 2003, and a month in 2004. I first visited La Quebrada in the Summer of 2001 as part of a rural development project carried out by Cornell University, the USDA, and USAID in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. The U.S. government appropriated emergency relief funds to Honduras after the storm, and Cornell's International Institute for Food and Development (CIIFAD) managed various participatory development programs as part of the reconstruction effort.<sup>2</sup> I briefly investigated how local social relations and village politics affected the creation of an ecological coffee cooperative that had been established with the support of USAID and the USDA and was trying to enter the "fair trade" market.

During that initial stay, I observed that most coffee farmers showed little interest in "fair trade" compared to other strategies to escape economic crisis. A far greater number of farmers were abandoning agriculture altogether and choosing to migrate to the United States illegally. At the same time, many people who remained in La Quebrada were flocking to new evangelical churches that offered spiritual solutions to life's problems. I began to see fair trade coffee production, migration, and evangelical religion as related reactions to social crisis. All presented "ways out" of hardship based upon specific worldviews; I wondered why certain people or social groups would pursue one strategy over another, if they were discrete groups at all.

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<sup>2</sup> The bill in the House of Representatives that provided relief funds was HR 1141, "Central America and The Caribbean Emergency Disaster Recovery Fund" passed January 6, 1999.

At the same time, I saw the prevalence of these practices as symptomatic of something called "globalization," but I was not sure why. These three particular social responses to crisis--migration, religious change, and socially-conscious commodity production--all seemed to be signs of the times. La Quebrada had always faced periods of economic crisis: Why had these three particular strategies only emerged in the recent past, and how did these particular forms of action relate to global sociocultural trends? This case allowed me to synthesize three topics that have become important parts of the anthropology of globalization--migration, neo-traditional religious revivals, and global commodity chains. The fact that all of these phenomena occurred simultaneously in one small town made La Quebrada a perfect research site.

When I began my second research stint, the coffee co-operative had collapsed. One of its leaders had been brutally murdered in a domestic dispute unrelated to the cooperative, and coffee prices were at historic lows. As the cooperative floundered, migration and evangelical religion continued to flourish. I began to research both migration and evangelical religion concurrently. I started out, somewhat reluctantly, with a formal research plan. There was little data on Honduran migration patterns, and I wanted to get an empirical "lay of the land." I created a questionnaire and tried to interview as many returned migrants, potential migrants, and family members of migrants as possible, with the help of a research assistant. I recorded some interviews when given explicit permission to do so, and I always assured participants of confidentiality, detailing the goals of my research.

I was reluctant to proceed in this way, but felt that I should at least attempt to follow a formal methodology before moving to the more informal style of fieldwork that was my natural preference. I was reasonably sure that the surveys wouldn't work--either

people would be unwilling to talk or the responses would be superficial. However, a comprehensive survey would have been a valuable source of information on Honduran migration patterns, so I proceeded, with a fall-back plan.<sup>3</sup>

The formal strategy proved to be an unfortunate mistake. My social-scientific posture and somewhat bureaucratic explanation of the purpose of my investigations created an uncomfortable social distance between me and the people I interviewed early in the project. I was able to complete about thirty interviews, but the responses seemed forced and uncomfortable. About two months into my second research period, rumors spread that I was either working for the CIA, immigration authorities, or some other agency trying to deport people from the U.S. This was an understandable rumor that I had anticipated going into the project and had made every effort to disprove. I knew that such rumors would circulate (rumors are unavoidable when strangers show up in a small town asking questions), but I mistakenly assumed that the rapport I had developed during my preliminary research would help to diffuse them.

Unfortunately, three local men that had I had interviewed were apprehended and deported from Mexico while trying to migrate, and some people speculated that I had tipped off the authorities. The gossip became too widespread to ignore, and a few people abruptly stopped talking to me. Some neighbors told me that the local *coyote* (human smuggler/criminal boss) thought that I was investigating migration in order to shut down his criminal business, and I feared for my personal safety.

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<sup>3</sup> The fall-back plan was to focus on a small group of trusted friends, use their introductions to expand my social network, and base the study on natural social interaction and conversation.

By that time, I accepted the fact that the sensitive nature of my research required great personal trust, and that I would be better off focusing on the experiences of a small group of trusted friends than on a large sample of strangers. I had become friends with a successful returnee (returned migrant) named Javier Montoya who lived a few houses down from me. He had returned home to La Quebrada after spending two years in the U.S. only a month before I arrived, and I had befriended his family during my first research trip. He consistently vouched for me to other people and, over time, he introduced me to a wide spectrum of people involved in the migrant phenomenon, including the once-threatening *coyote*, who ended up being a valuable and cooperative source of information.<sup>4</sup> Thus, my method was basically to befriend as many people as possible and use my relatively natural social interactions with them as the empirical basis for this study. I now consider some of these people to be lifelong friends, and we remain in close contact.

The local religious groups were a relatively easy topic for research. Due to their proselytizing philosophy, they were eager to talk to me and explain the meaning of their faith. I attended religious services at three churches, and had almost daily discussions with church members and clergy. Again, I found that informal discussions and attendance at services provided more valuable information than formal interviews. For the members of these churches, I was a somewhat mysterious target of proselytization, because I am Jewish and there were no other Jews in town. I was hesitant to reveal my religion at first, due to the possibility of prejudice, but my

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<sup>4</sup> My key informant was a close friend of the *coyote* and personally introduced me to him in order to put an end to the rumors and suspicion. We also countered the rumors with logic. My defense was as follows: If the U.S. government really wanted to infiltrate the smuggling business, why would they send an obvious outsider (me) instead of a Honduran on the inside who wouldn't arouse as much suspicion as a *gringo*? Furthermore, why would I say outright that I was there to study migration if I was part of some clandestine plot? Would I really be that stupid? As soon as Javier (my key informant) decided that I was telling the truth, this defense proved to be convincing and the rumors died down.

Jewishness proved to be advantageous. I was able to have fruitful discussions about the similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity that provided a productive point of departure for further understanding.<sup>5</sup>

After the initial failure of my formal research plan, I stopped recording interviews. I did not even take notes during most conversations. When I finished a significant conversation or interview, I would jot down notes or memorable quotes when I had a free moment. I would then go home and write narrative summaries of interviews on a laptop computer, usually after 9 PM, when the town's nighttime curfew went into effect and I was stuck inside my home. Without a recorder or notebook, I was able to interact naturally with people in town, and this approach proved to be much more effective than uncomfortable out-of-context interviews.

As with any methodology, this approach had strengths and weaknesses. I was able to get rich personal accounts from a small sample of people, but this group was not "representative" of the community in the statistical sense often used by social researchers. I made an effort to interview men and women of all ages, religions, and social classes, but I have no statistical evidence that my sample mirrors the general profile of the town's population. Young men (under age forty) are probably overrepresented. This is the group of people that is most likely to migrate, and it was the group closest to my own age, and easiest to approach in an informal way. So there is good reason for young men to constitute a disproportionately large part of the

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Judaism and Protestantism share the value of "idol-smashing." Two evangelical preachers drew parallels between Abraham's destruction of the religious icons in Ur, which is only alluded to in the Bible, and the Evangelical rejection of Catholic iconography. Both religions prohibit symbolic representations of divinity, and use this rejection to demarcate the differences of their faith from others. This discussion led one preacher to conclude that Pentecostal Baptists and Jews were basically the same, due to their iconoclasm.



sample. A small number of women that emigrated to the US, but only two had returned to La Quebrada.<sup>6</sup> The number of females considering migration is certainly rising, but I was only able to interview four women that migrated illegally during my fieldwork because so few had returned to live in La Quebrada.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these blind spots, I am certain that the experiences of the people I describe here are in some way representative of struggles faced by many people in similar situations all over the world. I chose to write about this little town because its story connects several important threads of life under globalization (itself a disputed concept, as I will discuss in the following chapter). I hope that this work makes these connections clear and explains La Quebrada's importance for anthropological theory and international political practice. Although certain points of my fieldwork were punctuated by fear, frustration, and confusion, I never doubted that the people of La Quebrada had an important story to tell.

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<sup>6</sup> This is similar to the pattern found by Sarah Mahler in El Salvador (2003). Men are far more likely to return to Honduras than women. I explain the reasons for this pattern in Chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> By my count, there are between forty and fifty women from La Quebrada who have migrated illegally to the US.

## **Introduction**

### **Globalizations and Postmodernisms**

On October 27, 1999, the United States Library of Congress added the subject heading "Globalization" to its catalog. According to its description, "Here are entered works on the complex of linkages and interconnections between countries and societies that make up the world system." (LOC, October 1999). The library's scheme of categorization stands as a grand archive of intellectual classification, a cosmology of the scholar's world that imposes order and logic on a field of disparate phenomena. In the Levi-Straussian sense, the subject headings tell U.S. what books "go together" in the intellectual cosmos. Changing times and new forms of social interaction demand new classificatory schemes, and the library's addition of "Globalization" gave sanction to the notion that there was something about the so-called "world system"--circa 1999--that called for a new conceptual category.<sup>8</sup> What was it?

This is a difficult question to answer. The term "globalization" always seems to be used with some embarrassment by scholars, due, I think, to the absence of a precise definition and the air of millennial novelty that surrounded the term and its rapid adoption by the popular media post-1989. In my first year of graduate school, I recall a senior anthropologist at Cornell approaching me before a class called "Anthropology of Globalization" and asking me what, exactly, "globalization" was. I offered a confused, roundabout response that did nothing to diminish his skepticism, and none of the other dozen-or-so students in the room could add much clarity. I am sure that

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<sup>8</sup> Clearly, there was great demand for this new category. As of 2005, there are over two thousand works listed under the LOC's "Globalization" subject heading. Another interesting feature of this definition is that it uses network metaphors ("linkages," "interconnections"). Recently, several scholars have noted the tendency for people to frame contemporary society as a network, arguing that computer networks have become the framing metaphor for social relations (Hardt and Negri 2004:142; Riles 2000:3-5).

our confusion was the result of the genuine complexity of the topic and not our own intellectual shortcomings.

Generally speaking, globalization refers to the economic, social, and cultural integration of the world into a single society in which the global market has replaced the nation-state as the fundamental integrative institution of social life (Turner 2002). There are three main ways of delineating globalization from other historical eras: the first emphasizes economic integration, the second focuses on geographic mobility, and the third, cultural homogenization.

Within economics, the most significant element of globalization is the power of transnational financial institutions to determine the future of national economies. This has diminished the power of nation-states to make autonomous economic decisions, and has subordinated many political functions to the demands of financial markets. The primary social dimensions of globalization involve the new communities and alliances that have been shaped by migration and the increasing ease of transportation and communication, made possible by technological advances. The most important cultural dimensions of globalization are the global spread of mass media and mass-produced consumer goods, which has resulted in the homogenization (some would say Americanization) of tastes and life-styles around the globe. At the same time, various religious, ethnic, and cultural movements fight to reassert "tradition" in the face of encroaching cultural homogenization. One could draw historical analogies between these elements and past phenomena, but they would fail to do justice to the novel aspects of their present manifestations.

The main theoretical problem facing scholars of globalization is how best to understand the relationship between the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of globalization. Contemporary anthropologists have tended to focus on the social and cultural aspects of globalization apart from economic forces. Concepts such as "diasporic public spheres," (Appadurai 1996) "hybrid cultures," (Garcia Canclini 1995a, 1995b) "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999) and other forms of transnational identity are ways of explaining how new social formations brought about by transnational migration and the mass media have led to new cultural understandings of people's (or "a people's") place in the world. Generally, globalization is seen as a process that challenges the theoretical linkage between culture and society, ideas and material relations. How can one even conceive of *a* society in a world where people, things, and ideas circulate in such complex and chaotic way, and older forms of social identity like nationality or class have lost their centrality?

Herein lies a central contradiction that has plagued the study of globalization: Most people recognize that global society has become more integrated than ever, yet the structure of this integrated whole seems too complex to grasp. Most people recognize that the global market has increasingly drawn the world into a single social system, but the nature of that system and the way that it shapes cultural practices is less understood. This is due to the incredible complexity of the contemporary global economy and the lack of an adequate theory of how post-industrial economies function. There has been a string of important studies on the cultural practices of economic elites in the global economy, as well as commodity chain studies that explain the form and function of global networks in particular instances, but these studies tend not to employ any abstract model of "the system." Anthropologists often

describe the contemporary global system as "neoliberal" without specifying how neoliberalism differs from other types of capitalism.

Some resort to hyperbole, basically characterizing neoliberalism as "pure" or "extreme" capitalism. Graeber, one of the most insightful anthropologists of globalization, writes, "the era of the triumph of the World Market [is] one in which the most gigantic, totalizing, and all-encompassingly universal system of evaluation known to human history came to be imposed on almost everything" (2001:89). "Neoliberalism" is presented as capitalism on steroids, without much historical or economic perspective on its unique features.

Although changes in the global market now frame almost all anthropology of globalization, anthropologists have curiously turned away from economic literature. Some have tried to adapt world-systems Marxism to the present (e.g. Roseberry 1989; Kearney 1996; J. Friedman 1994; Freeman 2000), but end up unable to maintain a "core-semi-periphery-periphery" model of the post-industrial world. Kearney (1996) explicitly tried to address the inadequacy of the world-systems perspective to capture the global present, and ended up arguing in favor of "chaos theory," due to the shifting subject positions of people in the global economy and the difficulty in creating fixed categories or structures. Oaxacan peasants who migrate to the U.S. are his principle example, and he argues that the category "peasant" should be replaced by "polybian," a word that describes people who "move in and out of multiple niches...and adapt their being to different modes of existence" (1996:141). Kearney's conclusions about globalization are examples of what Hiro Miyazaki has called "the aesthetics of indeterminacy," a theoretical trope in anthropology used to highlight the fact that the

complexity of globalization defies categorization and should therefore embrace indeterminate, flexible categories.

The absence of contemporary economic literature in anthropology is partly due to the fact that economics has become dominated by rational choice approaches that ignore the social, historical, or cultural structuring of subjectivity. However, I would argue that the recent work of economists and economic historians has much to offer anthropologists looking for a historically and empirically informed definition of globalization. French economists Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy (2004) place the rise of neoliberalism in historical context, and see the past twenty five years as an era in which financial capital (as opposed to industrial capital) has become the hegemonic class in both economics and politics.<sup>9</sup> Duménil and Lévy define finance as the class "whose property materializes in the holding of securities (stock shares, bonds, Treasury Bills, etc.), and financial institutions (central banks, banks, funds, etc.)" (2004:16). They claim that from the end of World War II until 1979, the power of industrial managers (as opposed to capital owners) rose significantly, leading to wage increases, full employment, and social protection for workers in the advanced countries. Since 1979, they argue that "finance" has regained hegemony over industry, and that the reassertion of the hegemony of finance is the defining element of neoliberalism.

Duménil and Lévy offer convincing statistical evidence that the monetarist policies of the late-seventies and eighties provided financial capital with a strategy to overcome a structural crisis caused by declining rates of profit in the seventies. By raising interest rates in 1979, and escaping or dismantling the regulatory constraints that were

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<sup>9</sup> On this point, the follow Ernest Mandel (1996).

developed during and after the New Deal, financial capital regained the profit rates that it had achieved before the crisis. This success came at the expense of nonfinancial capitalists and workers. Industrial profits were used to pay off high interest rates. Real wages stagnated in France, England, Germany, and the U.S. from 1979 until the present, ending a period of rising wages that occurred from 1960 until 1979 (Duménil and Lévy 2004:46). During this period, the profit rates of financial corporations have risen astronomically, and the value of financial assets now dwarfs the net worth of non-financial companies (Duménil and Lévy 2004:110-112).

Duménil and Lévy have countered the common-sense idea that contemporary finance fuels economic production and creates employment. Instead, they argue that finance drains resources that might be directed towards industrial production by siphoning off profits to interest payments and dividends. They write, "...profits distributed in the form of interest and dividend payments do not flow back to the nonfinancial sector to contribute to investments" (120). According to their findings, short-term financial speculation enriches investors and destabilizes the economy, but it does not create employment. Simplified to its core, Duménil and Lévy's argue that globalization has allowed rent-seeking classes (finance) to replace productive classes (industrial capital) as the hegemonic sectors of society under globalization.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is an ongoing debate among Marxian scholars over whether financial speculation can be viewed as a form of production. Duménil and Lévy believe that all value is based on the transformation of nature through human labor power, and that finance is therefore a form of rentier extractivism that cannot rightfully be called "production." Among anthropologists, Fernando Coronil (1997) has also taken this position. Recently, Hardt and Negri have argued that finance should be considered a form of production because the knowledge produced by financial speculators adds to the total intellectual capacity of humanity and could potentially lead to centralized management of the world economy (2004). Hardt and Negri developed a theory of "immaterial production" to apply to knowledge work, and see finance as one component of this general type of labor (2001, 2004).

I believe that the idea that "money can create money" severs the process of value creation from its material referent to an unacceptable degree. Although knowledge work is clearly a form of labor, we must not lose site of the fact that the post-industrial knowledge economy basically manages and streamlines processes of material production, exchange, and distribution. Knowledge work is a form of

Thus, the key element of globalization is the subordination of the modern nation-state to international financial markets, and the reemergence of unregulated capitalism on a global, rather than national, level. "Leveling the playing field" for finance does not necessarily lead to capital investments that help national economies, as argued by many proponents of free-marketism. If the "modern" idea of progress was based upon the mixed economy, class-compromise and the development of governmental policies oriented towards an ever-expanding alliance of social classes, then globalization truly represents a new era of "economic postmodernity," due to the increased power of an ever-narrowing class of speculative capitalists to define the terms of sociopolitical life. Just as significantly, this process has been ideologically accepted as a natural consequence of technological change. The macroeconomic changes described by Duménil and Lévy have led to changes in the political and cultural spheres.

I do not use the term "neoliberal" to describe the contemporary economic system for several reasons. First, the term is confusing to American readers who associate "liberalism" with New Deal-type social democracy. Neoliberalism, by definition, is supposed to have supplanted such state-led, nationalistic projects. In other parts of the world, especially Latin America, "liberalism" is associated with *laissez-faire*, but the term has an opposite meaning in the United States. More importantly, the term "neoliberalism" fails to address some elements necessary to the contemporary economic system that are anti-liberal--such as restrictive immigration laws, corporate

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production, but it is ancillary to the processes of material transformation upon which it depends. The work of Steve Fraser (2005) provides an especially insightful look at how financial speculation has been viewed by intellectuals throughout American history. Fraser shows that there has long been historical debate over the social costs and benefits of financial speculation. Certainly, financial knowledge is a form of intellectual production (as was the development of management science during Marx's day), but this knowledge is still an instrumental part of the total process of capitalist production.



welfare schemes (such as deposit insurance and bankruptcy protection), protective tariffs, and subsidies. These factors undermine principles of free-marketism, but they are absolutely vital to the maintenance of the economic order of globalization. To take an obvious example that is especially relevant to this work: If globalization were truly neoliberal, labor would have the same mobility as capital, enabling workers to migrate in search of higher wages with the same ease that businesses can relocate in order to cut costs. For a system to be truly organized according to market-principles, this would be minimal requirement.

### **What does all this have to do with a little town in Honduras?**

A central point of this work is that the systemic economic changes outlined above (what I will call *economic postmodernity*) have produced systemic cultural changes that center on popular understandings of the relationship between individuals and nation-states. The case of La Quebrada provides a striking example of how various cultural phenomena--in a place far removed from the center of the global capitalist order--bear the ideological imprint of these economic transformations. The goal of this research is to understand the relationship between the cultural and economic elements of globalization in a single Honduran community, and relate the experience of this community to more general patterns.

I focus on three phenomena that could be considered paradigmatic aspects of the "globalized" present and have become some of the most widely studied topics within the anthropology of globalization: labor migration and remittance economies, religious revival movements, and international commodity chains (in this case, "fair trade"

coffee).<sup>11</sup> In strict terms, migration is a "social" phenomenon (ie, dealing with the actual interaction of people and groups), religious change is "cultural" (ie, dealing with forms of knowledge and belief) and coffee production is "economic" (ie, dealing with the acquisition of the means of subsistence). However, all three are instances where society, culture, and economy are inseparable. I focus on these themes because they are instances where cultural practices are directed towards the resolution of economic problems. They are three popular responses to economic crisis that are rooted in cultural experience. By bringing these three phenomena under a single analytic lens, I intend to theorize the nature of the relationship between postmodern economic and cultural change in Honduras.

This work is organized as follows: Chapter 1 places the study of globalization within the context of anthropological theory. I argue that the study of global cultural change continues longstanding theoretical debates within the discipline and should not be considered a break with the past or an intellectual fad. Much of the contemporary debates over globalization recast older topics into new language. The next two chapters introduce the reader to the contemporary realities of life in La Quebrada, focusing on how migration and the remittance economy are changing local culture. These two chapters interweave diachronic and synchronic approaches to migration, combining fine-grained ethnographies with regional history. Chapter 4 puts La Quebrada's contemporary political situation in historical context, describing the history of social movements in Honduras since the fifties. Using the biography of one of La Quebrada's most prominent activists as a model for the country's historical experience, I argue that the shift from the state-driven, nationalistic social programs to

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<sup>11</sup> Of these three themes, religious change is the least historically unique. However, I will argue in Chapter 5 that the specific ideological content of these religions is related to contemporary political economic changes.

local-level, NGO-driven activity is an immediate consequence of Cold War politics and Honduran militarism. The purpose of this chapter is to show how contemporary social movements rest upon particular understandings of the relationship between state and nation that have emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War. Chapters 5 and 6 describe two social movements that have arisen from this depoliticized climate, evangelical religion and fair trade coffee production. When viewed in conjunction with the historical argument presented in Chapter 4, these chapters suggest that religious change and fair trade are functionally similar to other social movements that have existed in Honduran history, but shift the terms of sociality from groups to individuals. In general, the mid-twentieth century idea of "development" has transformed into "crisis management," a situation in which any activity that generates income is considered "progress" and larger issues of social equity are shifted to the background or ignored altogether.<sup>12</sup>

In the Conclusion, I argue that the new churches and fair trade are particular examples of more widespread sociocultural changes that have occurred under globalization. Here, the argument returns to the theoretical debates introduced above and discussed in detail in Chapter 1. I argue that the historical explanation of Honduran social movements and the Cold War presented in Chapter 4 does not sufficiently explain why contemporary social movements have taken the narrowly-focused form that they have. To adequately explain why contemporary social practices tend to be based upon a particular relationship between the individual and a larger social whole, one needs to begin with an understanding of the structure of post-industrial societies and the general political economic conditions under which these ideologies have developed.

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of a shift from "development to crisis management" comes from Andre Gunder Frank's essay, "The Underdevelopment of Development" (1999).

Any attempt to link cultural changes to economic changes runs the risk of economic reductionism. How, exactly, does an economic ideology diffuse through virtually all domains of society and culture? Can we speak of "neoliberal culture" or, in my terms, the culture of "economic postmodernity" without resorting to the old Marxist base-superstructure teleology? If the sociocultural phenomena I describe in Honduras reflect the social order of economic postmodernity (and I believe they do), how does this ideology become so pervasive? This is perhaps the most difficult theoretical question of all, and it is where anthropology can make its most important contribution. At all points in this work, I address the historically specific, complex origins of migration, religious change, and fair trade. The complex origins of the phenomena defy unicausal theorization. However, I try to move beyond a particularistic interpretation and develop abstract conclusions that recognize common patterns in contemporary responses to economic crisis. The move from particular cases to general patterns is, by definition, speculative. But some speculation is necessary to get a complete picture of the case I describe. Though some may see the move from particularity to generality as "reductive," I see it as a productive and necessary part of anthropological theory.

### **Continuity or Rupture?**

Before continuing, it is important to recognize the historical genesis of globalization as a concept. For decades, theorists such as Braudel, Wallerstein, Gunder Frank, and Wolf have used Marxian theory to argue that a global capitalist world-system has

existed for at least three-hundred years (and up to five thousand years), and without their work, it is unlikely that the term "world-system" would have made it into the Library of Congress definition of globalization. The great technological innovations that define the "global" era--satellite communications, computers, genetic technology--can be seen as mere extensions of previous revolutionary inventions like the telegraph, railways, or applied chemistry, that do not alter the expansionary character of capitalism. This argument could be supported by only a brief glance at the English edition of the "Manifesto of the Communist Party," written in 1888 (or Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, for that matter). Marx and Engels made arguments about the unprecedented aspects of high-tech capitalism over a century ago which echo contemporary descriptions of globalization.

In the place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production...The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization...Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers...what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?" (Marx 1978:476-77).

Replace the word "bourgeoisie" with "Western world." Change "barbarian nations" to "traditional cultures," and remove the clunky term "civilization," with, say, "modernity," and part of this passage would read: "The Western world, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most "traditional," cultures into modernity." Sounds a lot like globalization.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> After writing this, I saw that this selection from Marx was used by Daniel Bell (1996) to make a similar point. The same quote appeared in Thomas Friedman's celebration of globalization *The World*

Similarly, the spread of Western tastes around the globe is not entirely new. Colonized peoples emulated European lifestyles for centuries, and Europeans likewise imitated the exotic "Oriental" styles publicized in popular books, photographs, and printed art, or displayed at expositions and fairs. The masses of migrants that traveled back and forth between America and Europe at the turn of the century packed away Sears and Roebuck catalogs in their steamer chests. Hollywood films spread throughout the world in the early twentieth century, and people listened to radio programs in the most remote parts of the world after the popularization of the transistor in the fifties. The global reach of satellite television and the internet may have unprecedented aspects, but it has many historical antecedents as well.

These continuities can only be taken so far. The economic system that underlies these global movements has many novel elements. The rising power of global financial markets was set into motion in the seventies, but it did not fully develop until instantaneous information transfer was made possible by satellite communications and the internet. The power of global financial markets was famously described as an "electronic herd" by Thomas Friedman in the bestselling book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (2000). "The herd" consists of transnational investors, who shift large sums of money *en masse* based on real-time information about markets and current events. Under these conditions, nation-states must always consider the impact of their decisions on global markets. Liberal authors, like Friedman, tend to see the integration of national economies into a global market as a positive development that keeps governments economically "honest," allows entrepreneurs to escape local

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*is Flat* (2005) , and in a review of the same written by John Gray in the New York Review of Books, August 11, 2005.

institutional obstacles, and engenders fair competition (e.g. Friedman 2000:13).<sup>14</sup>

Governments must avoid causing conflicts that might precipitate financial crisis, and the risk of mutually assured economic destruction keeps government in line. The market serves as an dispassionate referee that judges the behavior of states according to objective standards.

Critics of the liberal vision see capitalism regulated only by the rules of the market and minimal international law as a detriment to the citizenry at large. The search for profit becomes the basic organizing principle of social life, and the mid-twentieth century class compromise is weakened. As Daniel Bell writes in his 1996 "Afterword" to *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (first published in 1978):

...the market has become the arbiter of all economic and even social relations (as in corporate obligations to employees) and the priority of the legal rights of ownership and property over all other claims, even of a moral nature, has been renewed (1996:84).

He continues:

During the New Deal years and after, the economic relation was transformed somewhat...to become a social relation that instituted rights other than property...But in recent years, the social realm has been shrinking and the "naked" economic relation has been assuming priority, especially in the rights of the "shareholder" (even though the shareholder is an individual who moves in and out of a company quickly, seeking the highest financial return) as against a "stakeholder" who may be an individual who has worked for a company for twenty years only to find his or her place wiped out overnight (1996:85).

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Friedman is a liberal in the classical sense. He is often described as a neo-conservative in the American popular media. In contemporary American usage, "neo-conservatives" tend to be neoliberals, confusing though it may be.

Bell continues to describe other notable changes in American society that he observed between 1978 and 1996. One is the prevalence of "unease and insecurity" among the middle class, caused mainly by the threat of corporate downsizing, globalization of production, and distrust of government. Despite this growing economic instability, he argues that "*cultural divisions* have become the salient axes of division" in industrial societies, replacing class politics (332). The political energies of the middle classes are directed towards cultural issues of identity, religion, or morality, rather than economic concerns. He writes that the "politics of particularity" now characterize both the Left and Right in advanced capitalist countries, as narrowly-focused issues such as "family values" or identity politics replace more broad-based political movements.

Terence Turner (2002) makes many of the same observations as Bell, but takes the argument a step further. Whereas Bell saw middle-class alienation and "the politics of particularity" as cotemporaneous but not causally related, Turner argues that both are consequences of economic globalization. According to Turner, globalization has eroded the link between the state and the nation in advanced capitalist countries. States must now direct their policies towards a small transnational capitalist class, and this shift leaves members of the middle classes who are employed in industries that are deemed "uncompetitive" in the global marketplace marginalized from institutional politics. These marginalized sectors direct their political energies to cultural politics or New Social Movements outside of the institutional boundaries of the state, which no longer seems to represent them. Turner writes:

The globally-oriented elites who direct or strongly influence the policies of many contemporary states, and who act as mediators between the global economic system and the internal economy of the state...have little basis for identification or sense of national community with economically unproductive or uncompetitive elements of the



national population...They no longer depend on the legitimation of their power within the state on an ideological claim to represent all citizens of the nation...

The efforts of alienated citizens to create new vehicles for their civil and social values outside of the formal political structure, meanwhile, have led to the great multiplication of New Social Movements [which] stem directly from the quest by alienated citizens for forms of civic and political action commensurate with their social values, which they feel can no longer be realized through the institutional political structures of nation-states (65).

Turner connects several cultural phenomena--such as NSMs and identity politics--to the "dehyphenization of the nation-state," which has been caused by economic globalization. I agree with Turner on this point, but would explain it in more general terms. While globalization has led to increasing integration in the economic sphere (the electronic herd), the cultural sphere (the mass media), and the social sphere (migration/communications technology), the political sphere has become increasingly fragmented. International governance has become moribund and ineffective, and popular political movements tend to deny the power of states to manage the global economy.

Another crucial aspect of contemporary politics in the hegemonic countries is the widespread belief that certain kinds of governmental intervention in the economy hurt the general populace. A new kind of "shareholder populism" has developed among the U.S. middle classes, with important ideological consequences. The dependence of the middle class in the U.S. on mutual funds and stock for their retirement incomes, college savings funds, etc. has contributed to the belief that "what is good for Wall Street is good for Main St" (Fraser 2005). The economic future of the middle class is now tied to growing corporate profits, so the future of the nation seems to rest on the success of financial capital. In this milieu, any political project that hurts the competitiveness of the financial sector is ideologically conceived as a blow to the

middle class. This has allowed real wages in the U.S. to stagnate or fall while profits rise, with virtually no political animosity directed towards the financial class (except in the case of corporate scandals). The old antagonistic relationship between capital owners and workers/managers has been transformed, and a new "historical bloc" (in the Gramscian sense) of financial capitalists and the middle class has been created.<sup>15</sup> As historian Steve Fraser (1995) has argued, the new high status and popular legitimacy given to speculative Wall Street capitalists is a recent cultural consequence of these changes in the capitalist order. People look to the captains of industry for moral and political leadership.

When viewed in historical context, economic globalization has produced a political imbalance. The progress made by modern states in domesticating capitalism in the interest of "the nation" during the twentieth century is turned back. No international legal system performs the regulatory function of the modern state. Companies establish offshore affiliates to avoid taxes, relocate to Third World nations to avoid labor standards, or hire undocumented migrants to cut costs. At the same time, there is no guiding political project that reconciles the tremendous potential benefits of economic integration with the tenets of social protection developed in the twentieth century. There is no "global New Deal" in theory or practice.<sup>16</sup> While regulating institutions such as the WTO exist to facilitate the free movement of capital around the

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<sup>15</sup> The strength of this historical bloc promises to become even greater if U.S. social security accounts are privatized, which would tie the fate of virtually all U.S. citizens to the performance of the stock market.

<sup>16</sup> The lack of a political project that reconciles global economic integration with state-level nationalism is especially apparent in the split between "new" free trade Democrats in the US, who favor market liberalization, and "old" factions of the party who seek to "keep jobs at home" and protect industrial workers from foreign competition with tariffs and subsidies. This division has come to the fore during debates over free-trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA. It is a significant political battle in which a faction of the national middle class linked to global finance and management and another linked to national industrial production struggle for control over the Democratic party,.

globe, there is no institutional counterweight to institutionalize social relationships at the global level. In this political climate, globalization favors a small transnational class. As Duménil and Lévy write with some over-statement, "the rule of the so-called international markets is nothing more than the rule of capital" (2004:2).

### **Depoliticization in Honduras**

As Bell and Turner have noted, the eclipse of state-level nationalism by the demands of the global market has had important political and cultural consequences in the advanced countries, especially the rise of "the politics of particularity." Many of the same patterns are found in Honduras, albeit in a different form, due to the absence of a significant middle class, the country's peripheral position in the global order, and the direct, violent impact of the Cold War. Despite these important differences, the changing relationship between nation and state is evident in the three phenomena I describe in this work. Consider the following: Beginning in 1990, Honduras, like many developing countries worldwide, instituted a sweeping wave of structural adjustment policies designed to limit the role of the public sector in the economy and bring inflation under control (Noé Pino 1995). These policies ended three decades of agrarian reform projects, and dramatically weakened the political power of the country's agricultural sector, which employed the majority of the population and was therefore politically equivalent to the middle class in the core countries. Since 1990, migration to the U.S. has almost completely replaced populist movements and agrarian politics as the most prominent path to rural development for struggling farmers in rural Honduras (detailed in Chapters 2 and 3). The basic issues of economic inequality that

motivated the entire agrarian reform movement have been replaced by attempts to "make remittances work" for the benefit of rural communities.

At the same time, evangelical Christianity has replaced "social Christianity" or other forms of progressive Christian developmentalism that were powerful forces in the sixties and seventies (Chapter 5). Whereas the earlier Christian Social Movements--whether democratic or Marxist--focused on social inequality and secular politics, the contemporary evangelicals view sin and salvation as basically a matter of individual choice. Similarly, "fair trade" has replaced the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), a treaty that regulated world coffee prices through mainstream political institutions from 1962 until 1989 (Chapter 6). The ICA involved states in the maintenance of a relatively stable economic system, while contemporary "fair trade" frames social justice as a choice made by individual consumers.

In each case, the state is no longer seen as an institution that could or should promote social equity and development, and the individual is seen as the basic source of social reform. The earlier movements rest on a theory of progress in which the state plays a role in establishing or maintaining a class compromise in the interest of the survival and reproduction of national society. In each of the contemporary movements, individuals no longer see the state playing a role in maintaining social equity. I believe that these three phenomena are examples of a systemic transformation in the terms of citizenship that is a consequence of economic globalization. In the absence of a transnational political strategy to regulate or manage global capital, individuals have developed pragmatic, albeit limited, avenues to social change.

## **The Other Side of Economic Postmodernism**

The changing relationship between state, economy, and society is only half of the story. A second element of economic postmodernity centers on the changing nature of production itself. The character of capitalism has been changed in significant ways by media technologies. The laws of the production of surplus value through intensified capital and applied knowledge have been challenged by new forms of symbolic production. The process of value-creation has been unmoored from physical space and time, most clearly exemplified by the increasing commodification of symbolic forms through consumer marketing, branding, and advertising. Due to the proliferation of satellite technology and the consolidation of the media into global corporations, first world image-makers have unprecedented power in crafting the values, aspirations, and aesthetic tastes of people all over the world.

This point was key to management scholar Theodore Levitt's landmark article "The Globalization of Markets," which was published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1983 and is considered to have launched the term "globalization" into elite discourse. Levitt focused on the power of advertising to create new desires among consumers worldwide, and offered a strategy for corporations to capitalize on the power of global marketing by aggressively creating demand for a uniform, mass-produced product. Levitt writes, "Almost everyone everywhere wants all the things they have heard about, seen, and experienced via [new media technologies]...the world's needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenized." It is as if to say, "The world was once divided between people who desired mass produced commodities and those who did not. Now, thanks to the mass media, everyone wants the same things." Levitt, an expert on marketing, is attempting to tell business leaders how to manage the local

needs of consumers while recognizing the global homogenization of consumer tastes. His conclusion became a dictum that spread from the pages of a management journal to bumper stickers and t-shirts around the world: "Think globally. Act locally." How fitting that one of globalization's most prominent political slogans was invented by a theorist of marketing!

The idea that values are created by the commodification of symbols seemed to place the world of perception and representation above materiality. This concept reached its apogee in the dot-com boom of the late 1990s, in which wealth was seemingly created out of thin air. Skyrocketing stock values were decoupled from any referent, a process described by economist Robert Shiller as "irrational exuberance" (Shiller 2000). The material aspect of value-creation was surpassed by the primacy of brand-image, "buzz," and other media-based methods of producing value through the use of symbols and imagery.<sup>17</sup> The brand, what had once been merely a symbol that referred to a certain maker of goods, became a product in and of itself. Even the opponents of globalization focused on the most highly mediated forms of capital as targets of dissent. The so-called anti-globalization movement rallied around Naomi Klein's book "No Logo" (1999) and chose ubiquitous corporate brands such as Nike, McDonalds, The Gap, Starbucks, and Wal-Mart as its main enemies. One wondered whether the brand or the productive reality that stood behind the brand was the real opponent of sign-smashing activists.

The process by which the ideal surpassed the material was deemed a key aspect of cultural postmodernity, and it is on this point that the cultural and economic spheres of

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<sup>17</sup> In finance, for example, the traditional methods of evaluating a company's value by its balance sheet were replaced by rampant speculation based on hype and media reports. Celebrity financial analysts could decide the fate of a corporation based on a well-timed media appearance or press release.

postmodernity intersect. Frederic Jameson's definitive work on postmodernity (1991) emphasized the role of the media in the production of individual subjectivity. Baudrillard's (1994) concept of the "hyperreal," in which symbols are completely separated from their referents and all experience was simulacra, was the most extreme analysis of the influence of the media on postmodern cultural life. "Cultural postmodernity" involves the effect of the mass media on the production of values, beliefs, and identities. In its more extreme forms, it uses the ubiquitous presence of the mass media to argue that the division between the "real" world of materiality and the "fantasy" world of representation has collapsed.

### **III. Modern Anthropology in a Postmodern World**

Arjun Appadurai, the most influential anthropologist of globalization, follows the cultural postmodernists in emphasizing the relationship between mass media and social consciousness. He argues that the flow of people and media images around the world has dramatically changed individual and collective subjectivity, allowing people to imagine "possible lives" that were once beyond the reach of comprehension. Television and film have broadened horizons, changed consumer appetites, and, most importantly, changed people's concepts of membership in a wider community--that is, their identity--creating a situation whereby:

mediascapes...offer to those who experience and transform them...a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and technical forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives...These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex metaphors by which people live as they constitute narratives of the Other and protonarratives of possible lives, fantasies that could become the prolegomena for the desire for acquisition and movement" (1996:36).

Appadurai argues that the dual forces of the mass media and migration have deterritorialized social interaction and created new forms of belonging that are centered upon "the imagination," a faculty that he argues is driven by the media in the age of globalization. While no one would dispute that the migration and the global reach of television and film has had a dramatic effect on values and beliefs in far-flung places, the degree to which the fantasy world of the media interacts with material reality in specific contexts is unclear. Appadurai's emphasis on "imagination" as a determinant of social action fails to adequately account for the relationship between imagination and the particular material contexts in which people formulate their perceptions of the world. In this work, I will emphasize how "deterritorialized" movements of people, things and ideas ultimately are grounded in the concrete processes of social life, in an attempt to synthesize the study of local relations of social reproduction with a study of deterritorialized global processes.

Appadurai developed the concept of "global flows" in the first three essays of *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), which were all originally published between 1991 and 1993. He urges scholars to think of today's world as possessing "no boundaries, structures, or regularities," using a fractal model that emphasizes the flows and overlaps among cultures and explicitly rejects the "Marxist paradigm" (47). Therefore, this model is focused on indeterminacy, requiring a study of processual flows that have no common direction or structure. Movement and disjuncture--rather than structure--become the model. Because of the complexities of global capitalism, he argues that "our current theories of cultural chaos are insufficiently developed to be even parsimonious models at this point" and that the



anthropology of globalization should be "radically context dependent" and not systemic (47).

In this work, I argue that the anthropology of postmodern phenomena can be "context dependent" while remaining committed to systemic theory. I agree with anthropologists who argue that orthodox Marxism and world-systems theory fail to do justice to the realities of globalization, but believe it is possible to synthesize the study of particular contexts with a move toward the development of general theories. By integrating the work of economists on the post-industrial economy with anthropological studies of postmodern cultural phenomena in a particular case, we can begin to develop a theory of global culture that recognizes common patterns and linkages between social relations and cultural forms.

I use the term "postmodern" in an unusual way. I separate *epistemological postmodernism* from *descriptive postmodernism*, and this work is not postmodern in the epistemological sense. *Epistemological postmodernism* is a philosophical position that denies the existence of objective reality and the human capacity for empirical reason. This position foregrounds representational practices and the relationship between truth claims and systems of power, critiquing modernist grand theory. Epistemological postmodernists employ representational strategies that highlight the contingent and constructed nature of knowledge as it is produced and expressed through language. In contrast, descriptive postmodernism recognizes that postmodernism has validity as an ideal-type that is used to characterize the contemporary capitalist world-system in relation to the past. I value the critical spirit of epistemological postmodernism, and a great deal of this work is devoted to a critical interpretation of contemporary concepts of justice and progress that, from a certain

perspective, could be seen as constructions. However, I believe that these interpretations reflect a reality that reaches beyond the text. Much of this dissertation is devoted to defining postmodernism as an ideal-type, a task that would not interest epistemological postmodernists because it draws conclusions about external reality.

Like most anthropologists, I have based this study on sustained everyday interaction with a small sample of people. I take the understanding of individual action to be the starting point for my analysis. At all points in this work, I have tried to describe the conscious motivations behind people's behavior. This emphasis on the individual does not mean that I see people as entirely rational actors, nor do I believe that anthropologists should only describe others' descriptions of their subjective intentions. However, an emphasis on subjectivity (or inescapably partial representations thereof) must be a starting point if ethnographic fieldwork has any value at all. Anthropology is at heart an intersubjective endeavor, through which people grasp the nature of reality in dialogue with others.

Throughout this work, I have included a series of "Ethnographic Profiles" that are intended to provide the reader with a sense of how individuals in La Quebrada perceive their worlds. Such descriptions, by their very nature, are constructions that have a strategic/rhetorical element. I am representing specific people, and these representations have an artificial aspect. This artifice is inherent in all language and is especially important to highly-crafted texts like anthropological dissertations. I don't see any way around these representational dilemmas, nor do I think they should paralyze ethnographers. "Ethnographic Profiles" are selective representations, but I have made my best effort to accurately and realistically depict people's life-worlds.

These profiles are not based on "composites"--they tell the stories of real people in La Quebrada, with certain minor details changed to protect anonymity.

### **Ethnographic Setting: La Quebrada**

Honduras is an ideal location to examine the unique elements of contemporary globalization viz a viz other phases of global capitalism. Its history is intertwined with the rise of Western capitalism, and there are no pre-modern/modern/post-modern "Rubicons" that separate one era from another. The country's history has been one long process of transnational interaction: After the decline of the Maya around 1300 AD, modern-day Honduras was colonized by Spain in the sixteenth century. The country, along with the other United Provinces of Central America, gained independence in 1823, led by modernizing liberals that were influenced by the North/South American and Haitian revolutions. Post-independence, Honduras was greatly affected by British mercantile interests, and became heavily indebted to French and English banks after a failed attempt to build a transoceanic railroad during the California Gold Rush of the 1850s.<sup>18</sup> By the twentieth century, U.S. mining corporations came to prominence, and later multinational fruit companies held sway until the mid-twentieth century, leading to the popular, (and to Hondurans, deeply offensive) perception of Honduras as a "banana republic."

In presenting this sketchy historical chronology, I am only trying to highlight the fact that Honduras has been tied to transnational processes for centuries, and most of the literature that describes its history is written from a point of view that focuses on its

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<sup>18</sup> Only fifty-seven miles of railroad were ever completed, and Honduras did not pay off its debt to the European banks until 1953 (Euraque 1996a: 4)

relations of dependency to larger, more dominant countries, be they Spain, Mexico, England, or the United States.<sup>19</sup> Any analysis of Honduran history must transcend the boundaries of the nation-state. It has been "globalized" for at least five-hundred years.

Nevertheless, once I began my fieldwork, I saw things that had no historical analogues: Rural families relied on wire transfers from relatives in suburban New Jersey to buy food and clothing; illiterate coffee growers talked about marketing their coffee directly to European consumers who valued "fair trade"; families began to follow the teachings of a Miami-based "apostle" who broadcast weekly sermons over the internet. One goal of my research was to understand the current wave of cultural changes in relation to Honduran history.

Honduras lies at the southern extreme of what Julian Steward called the Mesoamerican culture area, which is characterized by the cultural influence of the Maya. However, most of Honduras does not fit within the Mesoamerican culture type due to its relative lack of Maya influence on present day cultural life.<sup>20</sup> Its marginal status in the post-war area studies model, developed by Steward and others, has led to its marginal status in the ethnographic literature. The anthropological study of Mesoamerica has meant the study of Mayan cultures for the past half century, and studies of acculturated mestizo groups are scarce. With the exception of the region surrounding Copán and the border with Guatemala, there is relatively little Mayan cultural influence in rural Honduras: Spanish is the predominant spoken and written

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<sup>19</sup> Historian Darío Euraque (1996a) has strongly challenged historiography of Honduras that ignores domestic politics and regional interest groups. By focusing on international connections, I am not trying to downplay domestic politics; I highlighting the fact that Honduras has always had a particularly close relationship to hegemonic powers at different historical moments, and that "globalization" has long historical roots.

<sup>20</sup> In archeology, this is not the case. Honduras occupies a central place in the study of the ancient Maya, but contemporary Honduras has far less indigenous influence than Guatemala or Mexico.

language; Roman Catholicism or Evangelical Protestantism are practiced without indigenous cultural syncretism; and there are few ritual practices linked to the Maya or any other indigenous tradition. There are some Mayan language terms used in daily conversation, such as *comal* (cooking surface or hearth), *milpa* (subsistence maize plot), *tecomate* (water jug made from gourd) and *cipote* (slang for child), but there is far less indigenous cultural influence in rural Honduras than in the Mexican and Guatemalan communities that have dominated the anthropological literature on Mesoamerica (e.g. Tax 1953; Redfield 1965, 1973; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1965; Foster 1965, 1967; Warren 1998; Eber 2000; Cahn 2003; Annis 1987; Fischer 1999).<sup>21</sup>

La Quebrada's citizens are mainly mestizo (alternately called *ladino*), people of mixed Native American and Hispanic ethnicity. There is one family of Lenca Indians living in town and one Garífuna family in a small hamlet that lies just outside of it, but apart from these exceptions, the town is rather homogenous in its ethnic makeup. In this regard, La Quebrada is typical of most of inland Honduras, which is 90% mestizo<sup>22</sup>. The town is located in the center of the country, almost equidistant from Honduras' two major cities, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.<sup>23</sup> Tegucigalpa is the country's

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<sup>21</sup> Central American countries with relatively little Mayan influence are under-represented in the anthropological literature. There are few works on the mestizo cultures of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Some notable exceptions to this pattern are Richard Adams (1956, 1957, 1979) Roger Lancaster (1988, 1992), Florence Babb (2001, 2004), Deborah Sick (1999), William Loker (2000), Susan Stonich (1993) David Pedersen (2002, 2003) and Sarah Mahler (2003). This body of work is small compared to the amount of research on Mayan regions of Mexico and Guatemala.

<sup>22</sup> In addition to the mestizo majority in Honduras, the following indigenous communities deserve mention: The Lenca regions of the departments of La Paz, Lempira, and Intibucá, the Jicaque communities in the department of Yoro, the Garífuna communities of the north coast, the Chortí Maya regions near Copán, and the Miskito, Pech, and Tawakah communities of the eastern departments of Olancho and Gracias a Dios.

<sup>23</sup> Honduran economist Mayra Falck (2002) places La Quebrada within the "developed T" of Honduras, a T-shaped region along the North Coast and the central region that receives the greatest attention from development workers and the state, due to its proximity to urban centers and paved roads. Compared to communities in the hinterland provinces of Gracias a Dios, Lempira, and Olancho, La Quebrada is not isolated.

political and cultural capital, while San Pedro is Honduras' industrial and commercial center. Tegucigalpa's importance grew out of mining concerns which began in the Colonial period (1550-1820), while San Pedro Sula's growth has been linked to the twentieth century banana industry and, more recently, a boom in export-oriented manufacturing (Euraque 1996a). La Quebrada is provincial--the great majority of adults have traveled to cities at some point in their lives, and the town's commercial and political leaders do so weekly. Many coffee farmers rely on credit from urban banks or coffee brokers that buy and transport coffee from farm to market. Road repairs in 2002 cut the travel time to both cities from nine hours to four hours, and since then a daily bus has traveled from La Quebrada to both cities, a development which has made its links to the city stronger in recent years.

Although the town is geographically central, it is not representative of an autochthonous Honduran "folk" culture. The town has only existed since the late 1950s, when a U.S. lumber company began harvesting pitch-pine trees (*pinus oocarpa*) and milling lumber for export to the US. Most of the community's current population descended from migrants from other parts of Honduras (or El Salvador) and arrived in the fifties and sixties. It is not a place to study "tradition" in the common sense of time-honored, culturally transmitted practices which characterize a defined social unit. For instance, the classic example of a folk tradition in rural Latin America is the *feria patronal*, an annual religious feast honoring a community's patron saint. Unlike almost every other Honduran town, La Quebrada does not celebrate its *feria patronal*. The only activities which bring the community together involve the public schools or the local soccer team. Although there are several wealthy families, they are not descendents of a "blue-blood" elite, but are typically people who profited in the coffee trade in the recent past.

Despite its geographically central location, La Quebrada is still an out-of-the-way place--a dusty and disorganized scattering of tin-roofed, cinder block homes and pine-board shacks sitting at an altitude of 4000 feet. Prior to the recent arrival of bus service, one had to hitchhike in and out of town, relying on the generosity of the few people who owned pickup trucks, or sitting on top of tons of coffee sacks in a trailer. Although there are no tourists in La Quebrada, the town has two small hotels which mainly house traveling salesman or visiting government workers in rooms that are little more than concrete cells. Though founded as a lumber-cutting town, La Quebrada's economy is now based on coffee production, and during the harvest, the town fills with seasonal laborers, traveling merchants, and coffee buyers.<sup>24</sup> During the harvest months, there are enough people to support a weekly outdoor market, several billiard rooms, and dozens of general stores. During the "dead season," La Quebrada is a sleepy and depressed place, where a couple of passing vehicles may provide the day's only entertainment. Although the stores may be open, their inventories dwindle down to the bare necessities and the market stalls sit empty along the plaza and surrounding streets. In the words of a close friend, "During the slow months (March to October), you can only live here if you are drunk or in love."

La Quebrada sits within thirty miles of the Represa Hidroeléctrica Francisco Morazán, the largest hydroelectric dam project in Central America, which was funded by the World Bank (IADB) and completed in 1986. Though the dam serves as an omnipresent reminder of the presence of the Honduran state and its international

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<sup>24</sup> There are two types of seasonal laborers. One group comes from nearby villages that are located in valleys, where coffee cannot be grown. They typically arrive in large trucks each morning and are hired as day laborers in the center of town. The other group consists of workers who stay for the season. They tend to have relatives in town who they stay with, or they set up temporary labor camps near coffee farms owned by people with whom they have developed ties over the years.

patrons, La Quebrada is generally neglected by the government and has the chaotic feel of a frontier community. Despite the proximity of the hydroelectric dam, the town did not receive electrical service until 2001, fifteen years after the dam was completed (See Loker 1999). The electricity produced by the dam powered industrial development in the North Coast, but the rural communities around the dam did not reap any benefits. The dam's reservoir severed La Quebrada's overland connection to the north, where most coffee was sold, processed, and exported. The dam project essentially isolated the community from its most important commercial link for almost twenty years, forcing coffee farmers to make a circuitous trip to sell their crop to exporters or sell to middlemen.

The entire *municipio* has no telephone, despite being home to more than 8000 people. Trash lies scattered all over the ground. Livestock and stray dogs roam the streets at will. Mills dump coffee pulp into the mountain streams, which leave the ground pure just a few hundred meters above La Quebrada but run brown with filth just below the town. Only one street is grated and in good repair. The other roads are impromptu jeep paths that are often impassable after rains. Though located in a physically beautiful environment with a pleasant, cool climate, La Quebrada is in many ways a neglected, forlorn place.

I must emphasize that all of my fieldwork in La Quebrada took place during a severe slump in the world coffee market that followed a major natural disaster (Hurricane Mitch)., The atmosphere of crisis and despair was pervasive, and the coffee project that originally brought me to La Quebrada was intended to provide an economic solution to this crisis. It had little effect, and many prominent coffee families were selling their land to finance undocumented emigration to the United States. A human



smuggler--*coyote de la gente*--had replaced a coffee buyer--*coyote del café*--as the town's wealthiest resident. Migrant remittances were quickly becoming the most important source of income for families. Migration was a dangerous business, and one that left dozens of families in disarray. People could be robbed, killed, or raped en route, or detained for long periods of time in Mexico or the US. Parents were apart from their children for years, even decades, often with little more than an annual phone conversation to connect them. No matter the physical and emotional hardships one encountered along the way, migration seemed like the most viable path to progress for many people in La Quebrada.

The only source of hope and vitality in La Quebrada seemed to come from the growing Protestant churches. Just before I arrived in the field in 2000, an evangelical faction took control of local politics and banned the sale of alcohol, ended the traditional *feria patronal*, and instituted a town-wide curfew. The pastors often used the rhetoric of vice and sin to explain the crisis in La Quebrada. By living a life of piety and strictly following the word of God, people could be delivered from hardship. From this perspective, asceticism provided a way to improve one's situation. At the same time, the religious movement was rather heterogeneous, spanning the spectrum from puritanical Pentecostalism to an "anti-ascetic" form of evangelical religion which had no concept of sin. These churches preached doctrines of personal empowerment that gave people a spiritual "way out" of crisis.

The central argument of this work is that the cultural responses to economic crisis in La Quebrada reflect a particular understanding of the social world that bears the imprint of economic postmodernity. In each case, people understand complex social problems as the product of individual actions, and they formulate individualistic

solutions to these problems. The absence of collective secular politics is striking when placed in the context of twentieth century Honduran history. I will try to make this case in the chapters of this work that deal specifically with La Quebrada (Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). Before I continue with the ethnographic case, I will explain the theoretical genealogy of the study of globalization.

## **Chapter 1**

### **From Diffusion to Globalization: Anthropological Theory and Cultural Change**

Is it possible to frame an analysis of globalization without relying on the categories "local" and "global?" Few would argue that the study of the intersection between the local and global has become a dominant sub-genre of twenty-first century anthropology (Kearney 1996). In much contemporary work, these concepts have been used to relate the particular to the general, with "the global" referring to the capitalist west, seen as clashing, intersecting, or at least interacting, with the particular "local" places in which anthropologists study. In many ways "the local" has become a code word for cultural difference, while "the global" is a cipher for market-driven homogeneity. Much of the anthropology of globalization is devoted to the study of cultural changes that are consequences of participation in the capitalist market, almost always conceived as a clash of "local" and "global" phenomena.

In many ways, the "local/global" dichotomy recasts longstanding theoretical debates into new language. Local is to global as particularism is to holism, and as diachrony is to synchrony. The perceived opposition between local and global is actually a struggle to integrate particular ethnographic cases (the local) into general theoretical frameworks (the global), and to capture the specific histories of local cases while remaining committed to some synchronic theory of a self-regulating global whole. This is the latest incarnation of two of the most fundamental theoretical debates in anthropology, synchrony vs. diachrony and particularism vs. holism.

There is a misperception that anthropologists have only recently begun to reach "beyond the microcosm" and study transnational processes (Lewis 1998) so it is worthwhile to place the development of global anthropology within the history of anthropological theory. Throughout the history of the discipline, anthropologists have developed concepts to describe processes of intercultural hybridity. Although these concepts build progressively upon one another, each is a somewhat unique way of talking about cultural change that reflects a particular anthropological *zeitgeist*. Chronologically, the theoretical concepts that are directly relevant to globalization are diffusion, which was in its heyday from 1900 to about 1935, acculturation (app. 1935-1945), and modernization (1950-1968). As with any summary of intellectual trends, these theories only constitute a small sampling of the many hotly-contested and deeply-nuanced theories that exist at a given moment. These concepts are important predecessors of the global/local trope, each of which intended to theorize diachronic intercultural processes.

The postmodern rejection of grand theory harkens back to the beginnings of American anthropology. Labeling anthropologists who choose "context dependent" studies over abstract theory "post-structuralist" fails to recognize the long tradition of historical particularism that has characterized American cultural anthropology since the nineteenth century and has co-existed with structural or social anthropological theory for most of the twentieth century. For example, Appadurai's version of "global flows" could plausibly be seen as diffusion for the postmodern age, due to its emphasis on processes of cultural interaction in particular cases and its rejection of general schemes of historical development.

Diffusion was a concept developed by Franz Boas, often associated with Robert Lowie (1920), to describe the process by which cultural traits (including technology, art, forms of social organization, folktales, and rituals) spread across geographic regions through historical contact between different cultures. In its early stages, diffusion was explicitly presented as an alternative to the evolutionary theories of Morgan, Tylor, Spencer and others, who posited that societies developed according to universal laws following internal evolutionary dynamics. Evolutionists, unlike the diffusionists, were not concerned with the way that technology was invented, adopted, and transmitted by real people in historical time. Instead, they developed universal models that placed societies on an abstract evolutionary timeline from savagery to civilization. Boas argued that such evolutionary laws had no empirical basis. Instead, he wrote in his article "The Methods of Ethnology" (1966:282),

Opposed to these assumptions is the modern tendency to deny the existence of a general evolutionary scheme which would represent the history of the cultural development the world over. The hypothesis that there are inner causes which bring about similarities of development in remote parts of the globe is rejected and in its place it is assumed that identity of development in two different parts of the globe must always be due to migration and diffusion.

Boas was stridently opposed to any untested universal theories of human development, and he emphasized the need to study the actual historical interaction of human groups. This could be accomplished through the study of material culture, archival evidence, comparative linguistics, and comprehensive field study. The diffusionists studied the history of pre-literate peoples, and they used historical, linguistic, physical, and archeological evidence to reconstruct pre-modern cultural traditions, forming the "four fields" model of the discipline. They did not focus on the dynamics of ongoing cultural change, but tried to reconstruct and catalog the history of cultural interaction

to develop ideal-typical models of uncontaminated cultural traditions. The general goal of diffusionism was to challenge universal theories of evolution by categorizing and describing the appearance of cultural traits that spread around the globe through migration and other forms of cultural contact, such as warfare and trade.

The concept of diffusion could plausibly be applied to "globalization," because particular styles of music, art, dress, architecture, philosophy, ritual etc. have clearly diffused, i.e. "flowed," around the globe thanks to technological developments. The Boasians share the postmodernists' general skepticism towards grand theory, with the important qualification that the Boasians had no epistemological opposition to model-making and valued scientific empiricism above all else. The Boasians were opposed to "armchair" theoretical speculation, but not to theory in and of itself. They had an almost obsessively cautious approach to comparative theory based on a radically empirical epistemology. Diffusion was dedicated to the understanding of "global flows" without any systematic model of their form and direction, and in this regard the two theories are rather similar, but one can only take the diffusion/globalization comparison so far.

Anthropologists no longer merely describe or catalogue the diffusion of culture. They analyze the dynamics of change itself and the impact of historical changes on the beliefs and practices of individuals and groups in particular cultural situations. The study of the internal dynamics of social groups and the integration of the individual in society was not a primary concern of the first generation of Boasians, but it was the focus of British social anthropologists who were their contemporaries, as well as second generation Boasians like Ruth Benedict who were deeply influenced by

psychology. The study of the relationship between social dynamics and individual consciousness has since become the primary focus of anthropology.<sup>25</sup>

### **Acculturation and Modernization**

The reconciliation of the synchronic British model of society and the diachronic American concept of cultural diffusionism was the major accomplishment of pre-World War II anthropologists. This synthesis was underway by the thirties under the rubric of "acculturation," another theoretical concept that bears much in common with globalization.

It is hard for a contemporary anthropologist to imagine the gulf that existed between American (diachronic) and British (synchronic) approaches until the thirties. The debate between diffusionists and functionalists reached its zenith in a 1935 exchange between Alexander Lesser, a student of Boas, and Radcliffe-Brown over the use of history in anthropology. Even though the two sides were moving towards a synthesis at that time, stark differences in theory and method remained. Lesser, couching his disdain for the functionalists, writes:

The American position is associated with a definite conception of history. The processes which control events lie embedded in time as well as place, hence the determining conditions and the associations and connections of events are in the past as much as (if not more than) in the present...Hence while investigation must begin with the case in the present, it cannot end there (1935:390).

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<sup>25</sup> Herbert Lewis (1998) describes the early attempts by Boas' students to move away from strict historical particularism. Kroeber joined with Robert Redfield in criticizing Boas' use of history in an exchange in 1930 (Boas 1966). Kroeber's student Walter Goldschmidt conducted a study of social change in California agricultural communities in 1947, a sign of the theoretical flexibility of the Boasians and their increasing openness to functionalism.

Radcliffe-Brown pithily responded to Lesser with an affirmation of the complementarity of the historical and functional approaches, writing:

Turning from content to method, Dr. Lesser seems to find some conflict between the functional point of view and the historical. This is reminiscent of the attempts formerly made to see a conflict between sociology and history. There need be no conflict, but there is a difference.

There is not, and cannot be, any conflict between the functional hypothesis and the view that any culture, any social system, is the end-result of a unique series of historical accidents. The process of development of the race-horse from its five-toed ancestor was a unique series of historical accidents. This does not conflict with the view of the physiologist that the horse of today and all the other forms conformed to physiological laws...One 'explanation' of the race-horse is to be found in its history...another in its physiology (1935:185).

Despite their clear methodological differences, Lesser and Radcliffe-Brown both seemed to agree that synchronic and diachronic approaches were necessary to any holistic study of human life. Anthropology could encompass both approaches, but a synthesis of American historical particularism and British social anthropology seemed unlikely.

By the late thirties, American anthropologists Robert Redfield and Melville Herskovitz began to adopt many of the ideas of British social anthropology and sociology, focusing on the internal dynamics of particular societies and the relationship between the individual and the group. Whereas the diffusionists focused on the historical development of a society, the functionalists analyzed the internal logic of a society at a particular moment in time.

Redfield studied at Chicago with Edward Sapir, a student of Boas, and he was influenced by Radcliffe-Brown and sociologist Robert Park (his father-in-law).



Redfield embraced the synchronic study of sociocultural life, and his early fieldwork was a study of the Mexican town of Tepoztlán during the post-revolutionary period. Rural Mexican society was changing rapidly, due to a rural modernization program directed by President Lázaro Cárdenas. Incorporating Durkheimian theories of urban disintegration from sociology, Redfield was the first anthropologist to explicitly focus on processes of cultural change as they occurred, focusing on the impact of modernization on "folk" culture and village society.

Herskovitz' interest in cultural change was based on his studies of the cultural links between West African cultures and African-Americans in Haiti. He identified religious practices, forms of kinship, and myths that had been brought to the New World by slaves and had survived with some modifications for centuries. He studied the syncretic mixing of African and French cultures in Haiti, and sought to develop a theoretical language to describe processes of change. Although he was trained as a diffusionist, he recognized that anthropologists needed a way to describe processes of change in particular instances in order to develop a general theory of cultural change.

Herskovitz, Redfield, and Ralph Linton were appointed by the Social Science Research Council to develop a research program for the study of acculturation in 1936. In a Memorandum that outlined the concept, they wrote that, "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups." (Hersovitz, et al 1937:149). The authors described the study of cultural contact as a *process* that required the use of historical data as well as in-depth functional understanding of present phenomena. The general intent was to understand how societies responded to cultural change, and

how the process of change was influenced by the particular characteristics of both groups. In addition to providing a theoretical synthesis between functionalism and diffusion, the newfound interest in acculturation opened up new locations for fieldwork.

Earlier generations of anthropologists believed that cultures that were relatively unaffected by interaction with the modern world were most suited to research, and they tended to avoid field study in places that had prolonged contact with European society. As Margaret Mead wrote in her introduction to *Coming of Age in Samoa*, peasant communities "belong essentially to the historical tradition to which the complex parts of European or American civilization belong" (Mead 1973:5). They were contaminated cultures--not exactly European, but not exactly "other"--and were therefore unsuitable for anthropological investigation. Redfield's work in Mexico and Herskovitz' in Haiti were exceptions, but anthropologists usually focused on non-acculturated groups rather than peasant societies that were influenced by colonialism. The immediate successors of Redfield and Herskovitz, scholars like George Foster and Sol Tax, conducted the first ethnographic studies of peasant societies of Latin America in the early forties.

### **Beyond the Microcosm: Steward and Wolf**

At the same time, Julian Steward was developing a different method of analyzing cultural change that would also shape the legacy of the discipline, especially anthropologists' interest in the relationship between small social groups and the global capitalist market. Steward was a materialist who drew inspiration from Marx, Engels, and Lewis Henry Morgan, reintroducing evolutionary thinking to anthropology. Steward believed that environmental factors determined the development of different

cultures, and sought to develop a comparative theory of cultural change as adaptation to environment. He developed the "culture area" concept, which attempted to describe the common cultural traits of large geographic areas. Steward argued that small societies were modularly integrated into more expansive networks of interaction, in which the parts contained some aspects common to the larger whole, but were not mere microcosms of the larger society of the "culture area." As Eric Wolf (1982) writes, "...the concept is not processual but structural. It suggests an architecture of a whole and its parts, which remain to be specified after the fact. The model is thus a "hollow" representation of societal complexity, theoretically applicable to all complex sociocultural wholes. Yet it makes no statement about any process generating the structure" (Wolf 1982:15). Theoretically, Steward's culture area could apply to a global world-system, but he only extrapolated his analysis to the regional level and "remained silent about the penetration of capitalism" on non-western cultures (Wolf 1982:15).

Steward tested his regional approach in a large-scale study of Puerto Rico that began in 1947. The study was intended to develop a theoretical model of national culture in complex societies, using a set of coordinated community studies. By studying the different sub-cultures of a complex society (Puerto Rico), the group would develop an empirical model of national culture. What common elements could rightly be called parts of Puerto Rican culture? Steward's students, Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, Robert Manners, Elena Padilla, and Raymond Scheele each studied a community with a different economic base (e.g. coffee, sugar, fishing) in order to find common elements of Puerto Rican culture and to understand the manner in which small social units were integrated into a larger whole.

The Puerto Rico study set the framework for the study of the effects of capitalist penetration on peripheral societies. Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz would carry Steward's theory of regional integration to its logical conclusion by applying world-systems theory to anthropology. This was a consequence of their field experience in Puerto Rico--Wolf studied a coffee *municipio*, and Mintz a sugar hacienda in the midst of industrialization. Both experienced Puerto Ricans' dependency on the capitalist market first-hand. They developed theories of proletarianization that would apply to peasant societies around the world (Wolf 1956; Roseberry 1989:148). In doing so, they laid the theoretical groundwork for "peasant studies" (see Wolf 1966, 1969), an important branch of the discipline in the seventies and eighties that would be a major theoretical influence for the study of globalization.<sup>26</sup>

Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* is the definitive text in the anthropology of global capitalism. In it, Wolf lays the groundwork for a "world-systems" anthropology that traces how changing structures of economic production in the West affected "micro-populations" around the globe. Wolf argues that global capitalist expansion created many of the social formations that, up until the 1980s, had been treated as timeless and isolated by social anthropologists or studied by ethnohistorians and diffusionists in a manner that separated indigenous histories from the history of Europe. These historical anthropologists, though interested in historical connections between peoples, offered no theory of historical change (Wolf 1982:19). Quoting Alexander Lesser, Wolf clarifies the difference between his Marxist historicism and that of the Boasians, writing:

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Kearney's *Reconceptualizing the Peasantry* (1996) is an important attempt to adapt peasant studies to the contemporary world. In it, he argues that the category of "peasant" is no longer useful. Due to the multiple and highly mobile positions of people in the global economy, it is now difficult to call a specific group "peasants" based on their position within a determinate mode of production.

Alexander Lesser...asked years ago that 'we adopt as a working hypothesis the universality of human contact and influence'; that we think 'of human societies--prehistoric, primitive, or modern--not as closed systems, but as open systems'; that we see them 'as inextricably involved with other aggregates, near and far, in weblike, netlike connections' (1961:42). The labors of ethnohistorians have demonstrated the validity of this advice in case after case. Yet it remains merely programmatic until we can move from a consideration of connections at work in separate cases to a wider perspective, one that will allow U.S. to connect the connections in theory as well as in empirical study (Wolf 1982:19).

Wolf's theory of history is based on a particular use of the "mode of production" concept to create a Neo-Marxist model of universal history. Whereas Wolf had criticized Steward's theory of cultural integration for its ignorance of the world-historical processes that generated social structures, Wolf's theory focused on these processes.

The key to Wolf's theory was the "mode of production." Modes of production are "specific, historically occurring sets of social relations through which labor is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, and knowledge" (Wolf 1982:75). He delineates three modes--capitalism, the tributary mode, and the kin-ordered mode--but his main emphasis is the manner in which capitalism interacted with the other two modes. His use of the mode of production should not be confused with that of structural Marxists such as Louis Althusser and Maurice Godelier. The French structuralists used the term as an abstraction that described the articulation of different levels of a social formation. They were not concerned with history or the actual interaction of modes of production, but only with the rationalist explanation of how the various spheres or "instances" of society--"economic, juridico-political, ideological, theoretical"--were part of a self-reproducing, abstract system (Roseberry 1989:158).

In contrast to the rationalist, static approach of the Althusserians, Wolf was interested in tracing how changing structures of economic production in the West affected "micro-populations" around the globe. Mercantile expansion and, later, capitalist production, drove Europeans around the world in search of labor and raw materials, transforming every society they came into contact with. Global expansion was predicated by the demand for commodities in Europe, such as tea, cotton, sugar, and precious metals, and the expansion of these industries affected, either directly or indirectly, every society studied by anthropologists.

Wolf's work gave anthropologists the theoretical language to analyze the relationship between particular ethnographic cases and the macro-level processes of global capitalism. It placed the study of the global capitalist market squarely in the sights of anthropologists and provided a theoretical framework for understanding the connection of commodity consumption with production in peripheral societies (see Nash 1979; Mintz 1985; Roseberry et al 1991; Striffler 2002b, 2005; Chatterjee 2001).

Wolf's version of global anthropology had a strong political agenda that cannot be ignored. The rise of "peasant studies" in anthropology occurred in the late-sixties, with two influential texts (*Peasants* and *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*) by Wolf that predated *Europe and the People Without History* but contained the same theoretical orientation. Wolf and other Marxist anthropologists played important roles in the anti-war movement that engulfed American universities during that time. Anthropologists who focused on global capitalism emphasized the violent and oppressive aspects of European and American imperialism within the context of their opposition to Vietnam and other Cold War military interventions in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1958), Cuba (1962), Chile (1973), and other countries around the world.

The Marxian version of culture change was a critique of modernity that should be placed in the context of the American academy in the sixties. Indeed, critiques of development and the relationship between anthropology and imperialism (e.g. Gough 1968; Frank 1969) provided theoretical armature to support the anti-imperialist sentiment that already existed in practice at major universities.

The Marxian critique of capitalist modernity presented a challenge to modernization theory, another influential branch of anthropology that developed in the forties and fifties at Harvard's Department of Social Relations, MIT's Center for International Studies, and Cornell University, among other institutions. Modernization theorists were interested in the role of culture in economic development, and often conducted studies with direct or indirect funding from U.S. government agencies working in post-colonial societies caught up in the throes of Post-World War II modernization. These anthropologists were influenced by Weberian and Durkheimian theory (via Talcott Parsons) rather than Marxism, and they tended to be either ethically-neutral or actively committed to US-led modernization programs.

Anthropologists studying processes of modernization were most interested in how cultural values affected economic behavior, especially transitions to capitalism and rural-to-urban transformations. In general, they did not view urbanization and modernization as culture loss or disintegration, nor did they explicitly criticize transitions to capitalism in the Third World as exploitative or imperialistic. Their work was a stark contrast to the radical critique of modernization that was developed by the "peasant studies" school around the same time.

Given the political climate of the sixties, many critics labeled the modernization anthropologists as apologists for imperialism. While the most strident modernizers in other fields, such as W.W Rostow, unequivocally saw modernization and urbanization as progress, moderate thinkers, such as Clifford Geertz, developed a non-evaluative concept of culture change that maintained American cultural anthropology's commitment to relativism and ethical neutrality. For Geertz, and most anthropologists working in the Weberian tradition, modernization could not be viewed *a priori* as either progress or disintegration. Modernization brought changes--such as legal rationalization and transitions to capitalism--and these changes would always be contested by different interest groups within society. Some groups would inevitably bemoan the loss of tradition, while others would celebrate modernity, depending on the locally-specific meaning of these concepts. The task of anthropology was to understand modernization as it occurred in specific contexts.

Geertz criticized Redfield's disintegrative view of folk-to-urban transitions as well as Marxian critical scholarship (Geertz 1973:93-129).<sup>27</sup> According to Geertz, these theories failed to pay due attention to the meaning of social change to the people who lived through it. The meaning of change to the anthropologist was one thing, its meaning to the subjects of anthropological research was quite another, and the task of anthropology was to describe the on-the-ground realities of cultural change without judging such processes according to ethnocentric normative standards or political agendas.

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to remember that Geertz' most influential challenges to Marxism were published in the late-sixties and early-seventies, at the time when the anti-war movement was at its peak and these criticisms of Marxism seemed especially conservative, if not reactionary.



Geertz' early work in Indonesia provides the clearest example of how the Weberian perspective can be used to understand cultural change. His studies in Java and Bali stressed that culture, society, and economy must be seen as autonomous spheres of human life.<sup>28</sup> Geertz saw the conflict and temporary crisis caused by modernization in Indonesia as the inevitable result of change. Changing social realities would always clash with pre-existing understandings of the world, leading to confusion and conflicts of meaning as people sought to interpret the changes they were experiencing. The key point is that Geertz did not see such conflict as disintegrative--as in Durkheimian anomie or Marxian alienation--conflict was simply a matter of the inevitable friction that accompanied times of radical change. He explicitly challenged Redfield's idea of the "disintegration" caused by urbanization. This idea is most clearly expressed in Geertz' first major publication, "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example" (1954). On modernization of the Central Javanese town of Modjukuto, he writes:

In these enclaves of peasants-come-to-town (or of sons and grandsons of peasants-come-to-town), Redfield's folk culture is being constantly converted into his urban culture, though this latter is not accurately characterized by such negative and residual terms as "secular," "individualized," and "culturally disorganized." What is occurring in the kampongs<sup>29</sup> is not so much a destruction of traditional ways of life, as a construction of a new one; the sharp social conflict...is not simply indicative of a loss of cultural consensus, but rather is indicative of a search, not yet entirely successful, for new, more generalized patterns of belief and value" (1973:150).

Geertz argued strongly that culture has a life of its own and cannot be explained as an effect of infrastructural forces (contra Marx) or social relations (contra Durkheim).

His culture concept is based in on an understanding of human behavior from the point

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<sup>28</sup> In this regard, Geertz challenged Parsonian systems theory, which viewed culture, society, and economy as functionally inter-related. In an "ideal" well-integrated society in the Parsonian sense, culture performed a "pattern-maintenance" function. "Culture" was the system of values that reinforced an existing system of social relations (Parsons 1971)

<sup>29</sup> "Kampongs" are neighborhoods of recently arrived peasants in Java.

of view of the individual actor. He follows Weber's *verstehen* sociology, an attempt to grasp the world-view of historically and culturally situated individuals and to describe the meaning and significance of their lived experiences. On the one hand, his emphasis on culture as an autonomous entity followed the idealist tradition set by Benedict and Mead, but Geertz' version of culture was far less static and essentialist. Whereas the Boasians had an omnibus definition of culture as "learned behavior" or the total lifeways of a group, Geertz emphasized the need to understand cultural beliefs in particular historical contexts. He did not view culture as a transcendent set of characteristics or dispositions that were passed down from generation to generation by members of a society.

Geertz' theory contains no critical perspective of "local knowledge," such as ideology or false-consciousness. It is descriptive rather than evaluative (Geertz 1973). The great virtue of Geertzian anthropology is its ability to describe the on-the-ground realities of sociocultural life as they are experienced by real people. Its greatest weakness is its rejection of any abstract or systematic theory of how subjective perceptions are shaped by social relations not perceived or expressed by actors themselves (Roseberry 1989). Geertz has repeatedly argued that anthropology should avoid theoretical abstractions and remain "close to the ground."

Geertz' work was celebrated, justifiably, for its elegant explanations of how cultural values affected and were affected by modernization in post-colonial societies. Geertzian anthropology provided a humanistic approach that meshed well with face-to-face ethnography, due to its emphasis on the understanding of individual action in particular contexts. In contrast, most Marxian anthropology took "the system" as its primary unit of analysis and was too macro-focused to detail the effects of change on

the beliefs and feelings of individuals. At times, it seemed to blur the line between anthropology and political economy (Ortner 1984).

### **Marxian Responses to "Culture"**

In a well-known article summarizing intellectual trends in anthropology from the sixties to the eighties, Sherry Ortner concluded that anthropological theory in the eighties was moving towards a synthesis of Weberian idealism and Marxian materialism through various forms of practice theory. Practice theory, though hardly a unified, coherent "school," focused on the relationship "between human action on the one hand and some global entity which we may call "the system" on the other" (1994:392). Practice theory required the study of human action in definite contexts, interpreting how specific forms of action simultaneously are produced by and reproduce a specific, historically-situated abstract system. Practice theory rests upon the anthropologist's ability to contextualize situated action, moving from particular instances to general, even world-historical, processes. Though various forms of practice theory differ in their definition of "the system" and stray from Pierre Bourdieu's original formulation, all share the basic hermeneutic focus on relating parts to wholes.

The first steps towards practice theory (using Ortner's broad definition) were made in the sixties, when anthropologists began to integrate Marxian theory with a serious concern for the relationship between economic change and individual social consciousness. Sidney Mintz' *A Worker in the Cane* (which I discuss further in Chapter 5) is an important early example of this strategy. *A Worker in the Cane*, first published in 1964, is a life history of Taso Zayas, a Puerto Rican cane cutter who had

been Mintz' informant and friend since the author began fieldwork in 1948. Mintz argues that Zayas' conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism followed a period of social and economic upheaval, during which the hacienda system that had governed rural life was replaced by modern industrial sugar production. For the purposes of this discussion, this is significant because Mintz explained a cultural change (religious conversion) as the result of economic change.

In contrast to Geertz, Mintz saw the modernization of rural Puerto Rico as a socially pathological phenomenon that led people like Taso Zayas to turn to religious solutions to resolve feelings of alienation and powerlessness. As in Geertz' ethnography, modernization led to conflict and change. For Mintz, this process disempowered the Puerto Rican sugar proletariat, leading to the disintegration of social life and the rise of destructive individualism. Mintz had a critical interpretation of Puerto Rican industrialization that highlighted the alienating aspects of modernization.

Mintz' work was a preliminary step towards the reconciliation of Weberian studies of meaning with a Marxian critique of capitalism. In the seventies and eighties, anthropologists began to use Marxian theory to analyze cultural values within the general framework of class analysis, moving away from the economic determinism that characterized earlier versions of Marxist anthropology, such as the work of Leslie White and Marvin Harris. Marxian anthropologists on both sides of the Atlantic developed theories to analyze culture. The three variants that directly influenced the anthropology of globalization were Bourdieu's practice theory and two versions of "cultural Marxism," one derived from Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams, and the other based on the writings of Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno. Although these theories are quite different and are sometimes called "post-marxist," they are in

fact attempts to use Marxian thought to understand the relationship between class structure and particular forms of social consciousness.

Pierre Bourdieu developed practice theory to resolve a fundamental problem with Marxian thought. Weberian scholars had long criticized the Marxian concept of class by arguing that social power is determined by many factors besides property ownership. Social status can be based on concepts of honor and prestige as well as material wealth. Even within capitalist societies, a person can be wealthy and dishonorable or poor and honored, and social relations cannot be reduced to the ownership of the means of *material* production. This is especially true in non-capitalist economies without private property, money, or any other abstract measure of value. In such cases, power cannot be reduced to ownership of the means of material production. Rather than viewing the importance of ideas as a challenge to Marxian materialism, practice theorists sought to explain cultural values as products of social relations of domination.

Bourdieu developed the concept of "symbolic capital" to reconcile class, in the Marxian sense, with status, in the Weberian sense. What if, he argued, values like "honor" were seen as a form of property that could be produced, exchanged, and distributed within a determinate class structure (Bourdieu 1977, 1984)? Bourdieu's concepts of social and symbolic capital have opened up new pathways in the analysis of social organization by removing "class" from the economic sphere, strictly defined, and placing discussions of symbolic value (or status-honor, to use Weber's term) within an analytic framework of production, distribution, and exploitation. His approach was dialectical: Concepts like honor, virtue, refinement, and grace could only be understood with reference to their opposites. Values were predicated upon the

distinction between the valued practices of the dominant classes (high culture), and the "low" culture of the dominated. As Bourdieu writes in his conclusion to *Distinction*:

What is at stake in the struggle about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization...the evocative power of an utterance which puts things in a different light...or which modifies schemes of perception...shows something else...a separative power, a distinction...drawing discrete units out of indivisible continuity, difference out of the undifferentiated. (1984:479).

As this passage suggests, for Bourdieu, class relations were not only about control over material production, but also about the ability to attribute meaning to reality. Social power lay in the ability to differentiate valued categories from their opposites-- what he refers to as a "separative" power to create dominant systems of classification.

Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is explicitly presented as an attempt to synthesize Weberian subjectivism (the view that values should be best understood from the perspective of individual actors) with a Marxian emphasis on the determination of values by class relations. The tendency to see "class" as constituting individual subjects led Althusserian Marxists to take classes as "the" subjects of history and therefore ignore human subjectivity to an absurd degree. Bourdieu's work was an attempt to rescue subjectivity from Althusserian rationalism without succumbing to subjectivism.

For Bourdieu, individual beliefs and social value can be synthesized through the concept of practice (1977:1-71). He criticizes structuralism and Althusserian Marxism for reducing human action to an effect of structural forces, and criticizes ethnomethodology and game-theory for viewing individual action as completely

improvisational and therefore separate from social constraints. His concept of practice is designed to synthesize agency and structure by focusing on how individuals strategically maximize symbolic value in their everyday behavior. Tacit behavioral dispositions--*habitus*--make the core values of a society explicit. At the same time, repetitive patterns of action reproduce those values, while individual actors remain largely unaware of this process of reproduction. Class structure determines meaning, and individuals unconsciously reproduce that system of meaning in their everyday activity.

Bourdieu's theory is quite similar to rational choice economics. Instead of striving for economic gain, individuals strategically pursue social status (symbolic capital). Although Bourdieu allows for some degree of individual creativity, action is always directed towards ends that are socially determined, and people ceaselessly try to maximize symbolic capital. In this theory, it is unclear how or if people can consciously determine values, and actors are left to unconsciously reproduce a pre-existing system that is, in the final analysis, an effect of class domination. "At the end of the day, there is no room for subjectivity, agency, consciousness, cultural symbolism, or meaning in Bourdieu, save as reflexive determinations of a self-reproducing social structure and the eternal competition for relative distinction within it" (Fajans 1998:281). Social life is reduced to the strategic pursuit of status-honor. Like rational-choice thinkers, who see individual action as the pursuit of marginal utility, Bourdieu develops a theory of maximization with socially-determined ends. Call it "irrational choice."

The second major variant of Marxian anthropology was derived from Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson and was based on the concept of

hegemony (Gramsci) or "dominant culture" (Williams). Whereas Bourdieu's definition of culture was synchronic and rationalist (based on logical relations within an abstract totality), this second version of culture was diachronic and empiricist, focusing on the historical determination of values in relation to economic history. Its general focus on the relationship between "high" and "low" culture was similar to Bourdieu's empirical work in *Distinction*, but thinkers from this school were more concerned with describing historically particular cases than with abstractly theorizing the social dynamics of value and meaning.

One of the most influential proponents of this version of cultural Marxism in anthropology was William Roseberry, who explicitly presented his work as a materialist alternative to Geertz' version of culture as an autonomous sphere of social life (1989:17-29). Roseberry's cultural Marxism can be summed up without too much oversimplification by two famous dictums from Marx, both of which he cites in his essay "Marxism and Culture" (1989): The first, from *The German Ideology*, is "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of the society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force" (Marx and Engels 1970:64 cited in Roseberry 1989:44). The second dictum, also from *The German Ideology*, emphasizes the production of consciousness as an active material process--"The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity..."(Marx and Engels 1970:42 cited in Roseberry 1989:38).



For Roseberry, cultural values were considered to be the values of the dominant class, used to legitimate power relations at particular historical moments. Unlike more polemical versions of "false consciousness," such as that of Lukacs, Roseberry saw culture as something that had to be legitimated through a combination of coercion and consent, rather than through sheer domination and the mystification of the masses. Hegemony was, to some degree, a bargain between elites and popular classes that reproduced relations of power. In this regard, he followed Gramsci, for whom subaltern classes accepted the authority of dominant classes, both politically and ideologically, through the creation of class alliances or "historical blocs" (Gramsci 1971). Roseberry's view of hegemony was more dynamic than that of James Scott (1985, 1986, 1990), who highlighted instances of peasant resistance in order to stress the "incomplete" nature of class domination. In an exchange with Scott, Roseberry argued that, "Gramsci understood and emphasized, more clearly than did his interpreters, the complex unity of coercion and consent in situations of domination" (Roseberry 1994:358). Contra Scott, Roseberry maintained that acts of resistance were always part of the hegemonic bargain, and should not be seen as challenges to the Gramscian formulation of hegemony. Hegemony, by definition, was always incomplete.

Roseberry's analysis was based upon the relationship between class relations and cultural values in particular historical contexts, such as the formation of historical blocs in Venezuela (Roseberry 1983). In this regard, his work was more historical than sociological. Whereas Bourdieu focused on social relations synchronically, Roseberry emphasized the historical determination of class relations, rather than attempting to formulate the dynamics of class domination. Roseberry had no theory of how class politics were internalized by individuals. He followed Gramsci in focusing

on the state's role in the production of individual subjects (through public education, for example), but consistently maintained that hegemony must be seen as a contested, dynamic process in particular cases (Roseberry 1994).

The third variant of Marxian anthropology was derived from Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno's critiques of the role of the mass media in the creation of social consciousness. Both authors were preoccupied with the cultural and political consequences of the development of mass culture during the rise of German fascism. Like Bourdieu and Roseberry, they focused on the relationship between class politics and popular understandings of reality, emphasizing the sociopolitical consequences of photography and film (Benjamin 1968) and recorded sound (Adorno 1982). These authors were rediscovered by American anthropologists attempting to answer the same questions that drove Bourdieu and Roseberry: To what degree do symbolic values reinforce or challenge social relations? And, to what degree is culture autonomous from economy and society?

The Frankfurt School authors reclaimed the Marxian concept of the fetish, which became a major point of reference for anthropologists. Marx famously defined the commodity fetish as the process whereby "productions of the human brain appear as independent entities endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and the human race" (Marx 1978:321). Marx believed that commodities take on a magical character under capitalism because they hide social relations of production behind an appearance of autonomous value. His concept of fetishism was based on the idea that the value of things is an inherently social creation that is misrecognized as the physical property of a material object, realized in exchange. Exchange value is expressed as a specific quantity of abstract labor, usually through

the symbolic medium of money. People partially recognize their own labor-power in the commodity, but this is an alienated representation, and part of the seductive quality of goods comes from the desire to re-appropriate one's productive powers (Sangren 2000).

For anthropologists, "the fetish" provided a way to critically analyze cultural forms not as collective representations of social relations, but as seductive misrepresentations that obscure the conditions of their production. This form of analysis maintained some connection between social relations and cultural representation, and synthesized the functionalist tradition with a critical perspective. Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980) is the most well-known and controversial attempt to analyze cultural change using the concept of fetishism. Taussig argues that popular images of the devil among recently-proletarianized peasants in Colombia and Bolivia are expressions of alienated social consciousness under capitalism. These representations provide a critique of capitalism that is contrasted against a rather edenic, trans-historical pre-capitalist idyll. The peasants are only marginally integrated into capitalist society, and express their disdain for capitalism through fetishized devil imagery and other rituals.

This work came under fire for its romantic vision of peasant life and slavery (Trouillot 1986; Turner 1986) and its inaccurate historical accounts of peasant activism (Roseberry 1989:220-221). Despite its flaws, this work is a significant attempt to develop a Marxian theory of cultural representations, based on a critical understanding of the relationship between "local knowledge" and class relations. Cultural forms are necessarily tied to relations of domination, but they are not isomorphic representations

thereof. Unfortunately, Taussig's anti-capitalist zeal leads him to serious historical inaccuracies that detract from the overall value of the work.

His work carries on a utopian aspect of Frankfurt School criticism, in which the cultural products under capitalism are seen as inauthentic "fetishized" reflections of the mode of production, while non-capitalist cultural products are somehow authentic and "natural." Turner (1986) has argued that Marx's concept of fetishism applies to non-capitalist societies as much as capitalist ones, because fetishes are alienated symbols that mediated productive activity in all societies. In his analysis, "production" is not used only in the narrow sense of capitalist economic production, but in the widest possible sense of total human activity. Non-capitalist as well as capitalist societies employ alienated symbolic representations of productive activity.

At this point, it is worth re-emphasizing the fact that all the attempts by Marxian anthropologists to develop a critical theory of class relations and culture were designed to challenge the Weberian/Geertzian definition of culture as a symbolic domain of human life that should be analyzed apart from social relations, production, and reproduction. The entire project of these diverse forms of cultural Marxism was devoted to the development of a critical theory of culture that avoided economic or sociological reductionism, maintaining the critical relationship between ideas and social processes without the teleological baggage.

By the mid-eighties, and to a greater degree the nineties, the very concept of "social relations" was being problematized by scholars who followed the Frankfurt School in emphasizing the importance of individual imagination and the electronic media in the formation of culture and worldview. Perhaps deterritorialized media images and other

mediated symbols had become the point of reference by which people understood their place in the world? Migration, travel, and economic transnationalism, in addition to the pervasive mass media, had made social relations so complex and indeterminate, how could one even talk of a totality with a determinate structure? People constructed their vision of the world through an incredibly complex web of information that defied geography and materiality, so how could their values be understood in reference to social structure? By the nineties, anthropologists began to question the utility of studying situated communities, and embraced multi-sited approaches that traced various social processes across space and time in order to capture their complexity (Marcus 1998).

Anthropology's turn towards a focus on the relationship between mass media and cultural identity was greatly influenced by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991), which was first published in 1982. For Anderson, the modern concept of the nation was originally developed by "creole pioneers," an ascendant class of native-born bourgeoisie in the Americas who were denied positions of power by the Iberian-born colonial aristocracy. These creoles could not join the ranks of the aristocracy because they were not born in Spain. The rising creole bourgeoisie developed an ideological justification for overthrowing the aristocracy. According to Anderson, the wars of independence in the Americas required a unifying concept of "nation-ness" based on natal ties to a specific territory. The rise of newspapers and other print media allowed the nascent revolutionary class to construct an "imagined community" out of socially-differentiated and ethnically diverse groups in the Americas. Under the banner of "the nation," these groups banded together to end Spanish colonial rule in the wars of independence of the early nineteenth century.

Anderson's analysis of nationalism led many anthropologists to focus on the role of various forms of media in the construction of national and ethnic identity. Somehow, the original Marxian component of Anderson's work was lost in the shuffle. Scholars interested in "transnationalism" took Anderson's understanding of nationalism, or what he called "long-distance nationalism" in another context (1998), and applied it to migrant or diasporic communities that existed internationally, focusing on how concepts of ethnic belonging were either challenged or reinforced by the mass media (Ong 1999; Dávila 2001).

Appadurai's critique of the structural determination of values grew out of this intellectual milieu, and he drew greatly on Anderson's concept of the imagined community. Concepts of group-identity, and the cultural values that stem from identity, had been reconfigured by "global flows" that existed beyond any social structure. In such an environment, perhaps it is better to study the different values that are circulated and disseminated around the globe than to discuss the relationship of "culture" to a determinate set of relationships called "society." In many ways, Appadurai's challenge recasts the long-standing Weberian critique of Marxist thought: Instead of focusing on the role that a determinate social structure plays in the formation of subjective thought and action, Appadurai argues for a focus on the content of thought and action in specific contexts.

### **Globalization: The Culture/Ideology Debate Lives On**

Appadurai's contribution to the anthropology of globalization parallels Geertz' work on modernization in many ways, and some of the same criticisms leveled against

Geertz have also been aimed at Appadurai. Like Geertz, Appadurai has de-emphasized abstract concepts of structure and has emphasized the need to understand the meaning of global cultural change in particular cases. Some see Appadurai's focus on subjectivity abstracted from structural constraints as an ideological defense of neoliberalism. Just as Geertz' culturalism was criticized for its lack of a critical perspective on imperialism, Appadurai has been depicted as an apologist for free-marketism.

David Graeber (2001) has developed a polemical critique of Appadurai's work. Graeber concentrates on Appadurai's theory of value, the idea that the value of things should best be understood by a focus on the meaning of objects to different people or groups as they, the objects, move through various "regimes of value." In practice, this theory requires a definition of value as individual desire, and a call for anthropology to focus on the meaning of commodity consumption in different cultural/historical contexts, rather than an emphasis on how value is produced within an abstract system of class relations (Graeber 2001:31). This concept of value is one aspect of Appadurai's larger anti-structural theory that I have described in the Introduction (pp. 35-38). Graeber argues that Appadurai employs a consumerist concept of value that ignores the structuring forces of social relations. He writes:

The rejection of Marx, the emphasis on self-interested strategies, the glorification of consumption as creative self-expression...the end result is anthropology as it might have been written by Milton Friedman...Appadurai leaves one with an image of commerce as a universal human demiurge, almost a libidinal, democratic force...(33)

Later in the work, Graeber takes his critique even further, focusing on the political implications of Appadurai's theory. He writes:

...by now, at least, it is apparent to most people that when the 1980s and '90s are remembered, it will not be as the dawning of a new Postmodern Age...but rather the era of the triumph of the World Market--one in which the most gigantic, totalizing, and all-encompassingly universal system of evaluation known to human history came to be imposed on almost everything...Which in turn is what makes authors like Appadurai, who do address economics, so important: the neoliberal assumptions are all there, plain to see. Behind the imagery of most postmodernism is really nothing but the ideology of the market: not even the reality of the market, since actually existing markets are always regulated in the interests of the powerful, but the way market ideologists would like U.S. to imagine the marketplace should work (89).

Basically, Graeber believes that Appadurai's subjectivism serves to legitimate radical neoliberalism (anthropology as it might have been written by Milton Friedman). I agree with some aspects of Graeber's criticism, but I think he ignores the deep historical roots of the debate between cultural particularism and social analysis that I have tried to outline in this chapter. This debate stretches back to Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, and focuses on the possibility of theorizing "culture" apart from "society." Graeber's suggestion that Appadurai is a neoliberal apologist mirrors the criticism of Weber as "the bourgeois social theorist," due to the latter's lack of a theory of false consciousness. This criticism also bares much in common with the labeling of Geertz as an apologist for imperialism in the sixties. In each case, the absence of a critical theory of culture is seen as a withdrawal from political debate, due to the fact that Weberian-inspired theory downplays the role of class relations in the production of consciousness. Graeber's criticism of Appadurai's culturalist theory fails to seriously acknowledge that the latter's position applies to the analysis of culture in general, not only to neoliberalism or the culture of "globalization." Graeber ignores the entire Weberian tradition in anthropology, which predated postmodernism and globalization.

Throughout this work, I try to employ a critical theory of social consciousness, but I think the disparaging criticism of subjectivism is unnecessary. Anthropologists who



choose to focus on meaning in particular contexts are not laboring under the ideological blinders of neoliberalism; they are carrying on a long tradition in anthropological thought that has taken on additional political baggage since the sixties. That said, I agree with Graeber's central point, stripped of its polemical flourishes. Like Graeber, I believe that anthropologists must try to overcome the great paradox of globalization--the existence of a single social system coupled with a denial that "the system" has any knowable guiding structure. However, the study of the movement of people and things through various domains of the global system is an important step towards the development of such a theory, and much of the most important work in recent anthropology on migration and commodity chains has been concrete and particularist (e.g. Miyazaki 2003; Striffler 2002b, 2005; Bestor 2004). The ethnographic portions of Graeber's book, on the other hand, brilliantly explain the differences between concepts of value in non-capitalist and capitalist societies, but they contain no examples from the contemporary capitalist world. Despite Graeber's passionate call for a renewed emphasis on totalities, there is no real explanation of how "neoliberalism" differs from other eras of capitalism in Graeber's work, only an assumption that neoliberalism carries the logic of pure capitalist rationality to new extremes.

My own general goal is to synthesize an analysis of values in particular cases with a move toward a general theory of the relationship between culture and society under globalization. In the following two chapters, I focus on a paradigmatic example of transnational "flows"--labor migration and the remittance economy. I describe how transnational labor migration has led to changing value systems in La Quebrada, in an attempt to study global "flows" of people and ideas in a single community to understand the degree to which cultural changes are the product of social relations at

different levels of integration (local, regional, and international) as well as the flow of deterritorialized concepts of value and status in a specific case. The next chapter describes the subjective perspectives of individual migrants, and how cultural, economic, and social factors shape their decisions to emigrate from Honduras to the United States. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the role of local class relations on migrant behavior, and how people in La Quebrada assert collective principles in a time of crisis. Taken together, these chapters provide a micro-level account of migrant behavior, and underscore the fact that the tension between individuality and sociality still exists within the most deterritorialized and fragmented communities.

## **Chapter 2**

### **American Dream, American Work: Fantasies and Realities of Undocumented Honduran Migrants**

Chris Matthews: When I was in the Peace Corps I calculated it would take 350 years for the country I was serving in to catch up to where we were in GNP in the sixties.

Brent Scowcroft: And that's a horrible thought. That gets to one of the real problems in the world though, and that is the people where you were serving didn't know much about the United States. Now they watch television every night. Even in the boondocks they watch television and they see you shopping on Fifth Avenue and so on and so forth and they think, "Why am I not shopping on Fifth Avenue?"

*Transcript From Hardball, television news program, Dec. 2, 2004*

Many people are coming to this country for economic reasons. They're coming here to work. If you can make fifty cents in the heart of Mexico, for example, or make five dollars here in America, \$5.15, you're going to come here if you're worth your salt, if you want to put food on the table for your families. And that's what's happening."

*President George W. Bush, Presidential Debate, Oct. 8, 2004*

The quotations above contain two common explanations of contemporary migration to the US. Former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft gives a cultural explanation, focusing on the fact that increased knowledge of the riches available in the US, thanks to the global media, has altered individual and collective worldviews in "boondocks" around the world, leading to disillusionment and a desire for something more. According to this form of reasoning, the arrival of television disrupts traditional concepts of status and value, leading to a revolution of rising expectations, which

Scowcroft calls "one of the real problems of the world." Tocqueville argued long ago that rising expectations are effectively the same as declining fortunes--they set the stage for disillusionment and collective action. George Foster also made this point forty years ago in his classic ethnography of the village of Tzintzuntzan in Chiapas:

Because of scientific communication media, formerly isolated peoples become merely marginal. They are increasingly dissatisfied with their lot but, sadly enough, it is extremely difficult to convert this dissatisfaction into purposeful seeking after new opportunities (Foster 1967:3).

Technological change will always lead to changing values. Roads, boats, railways, print media, and radio (to name just a few examples) have changed the way that people perceive the world. In the present, ease of travel and international communication has certainly led to rising expectations for many formerly isolated groups who have now become "marginal" (to use Foster's word) due to their recognition of participation in a wider world.

International migration--as opposed to domestic migration from country to city, political reform, or revolution--is now the most common way out of this disillusionment for people in Central America. Despite the well-known revolutionary activity of the EZLN in Mexico, the years since 1989 will almost certainly come to be remembered as the era in which migration replaced agrarian reform and revolutionary activity throughout Mesoamerica.<sup>30</sup> In Central America this transition has been especially clear: the revolutionary tumult of the eighties led directly to the migration of the nineties and beyond (Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 1991, 2001).

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to remember that the Zapatista rebellion was rooted in the failure of Mexico's agrarian reform project to live up to its promises, according to Neil Harvey (1997). Regardless, the Zapatista movement has been limited to a small sector of Mexican society and its impact pales in comparison to that of rural emigration to the US.

What causes contemporary migration? The economic explanation, voiced by President Bush in a presidential debate, views the decision to migrate as a common-sense response to economic conditions. Migrants are motivated by relatively high U.S. wage rates and the chance to "put food on the table" for families. (Note that Bush corrected himself to assure audiences that migrants were lured by the exact legal minimum wage of \$5.15/hour.) In this view, migrants weigh the benefits of U.S. wages against other factors and make a decision that "anyone worth their salt" would make. They are not lured by Fifth Avenue finery; they just want to put food on the table, implying that they send earnings home to support kin. These migrants are realists who are motivated by a conscious evaluation of risk and reward and not the pursuit of a television-fueled "American Dream." In addition to providing an economic interpretation of migrant motivation, Bush's words countered the reactionary discourse that labels undocumented migrants as free-loaders who drain public resources away from "productive" citizens.

The cultural and economic explanations of migration have strong analogues in the social sciences. In their classic synthesis of late-twentieth century migration to the US, Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut challenge the view "of migration as a consequence of foreign destitution and unemployment" (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:10). They argue that one of the key points of distinction between the "new" immigration of the late twentieth century and the "old" immigration of the late nineteenth century is that "contemporary immigration is a direct consequence of the dominant influence attained by the culture of the advanced West in every corner of the globe" (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:13). In general, contemporary migrants are not directly recruited to come to America to supply labor for industrial expansion, as they were a century ago. Instead, contemporary migrants tend to have experienced a gap

between subjective expectations for success and lived experiences in their home countries. They seek "a car, a TV set, and domestic appliances of all sorts" (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:13), and wish to improve their standard of living to fit rising expectations. Therefore, people with some education and income (in the case of urbanites), or assets (in the case of small farmers) are far more likely to migrate than the poorest of the poor, who are not exposed to the lure of popular culture and do not have the economic resources to migrate. Portes and Rumbaut support their claims with evidence from Mexico (Cornelius 1977) the Dominican Republic (Bray 1984, Grasmuck 1991) and Haiti (Stepick and Portes 1986).

The case of migration in La Quebrada confirms many of elements of the typology of immigrants developed by Portes and Rumbaut (1996:8-27). Migrants with some economic means (especially small farmers) are generally more likely to migrate than the truly destitute. They fit within the category of "labor migrants," developed by Portes and Rumbaut to describe illegal migrants who perform menial labor in order to return home and "reestablish or gain a position of social respectability" in their home countries (Portes and Rumbaut 1996:18). However, migration has become increasingly possible for landless people as well as small farmers. It is now a common practice for members of all social classes and has become such a pervasive phenomenon that it is difficult to point to a set of sociological characteristics that might lead a person to migrate. In this regard, Portes and Rumbaut may have underestimated the prevalence of migration among the poorest sectors of society. Their explanation of the importance of Western cultural hegemony and rising expectations is correct, but the same factors that affected urban professionals and farmers in the eighties and nineties now impact landless people, due to the ubiquity of media technologies.

For example, electricity, satellite TV and the internet reached La Quebrada in 2000-2003, and few people are immune from the influence of popular culture. Even though the poor may not own a TV or have electricity, the impact of these technologies diffuses to them. In addition to this technological change, poor people are attracted to the U.S. by evidence from their local surroundings. The "first wave" of migrants from La Quebrada (from the late eighties to late nineties) achieved some success. People of all classes have witnessed the fruits of their success (new homes, vehicles, etc.) and this has had an ideological impact on all the entire community, fostering a "culture of migration" that reaches all levels of society. Not only has technology ratcheted expectations upward, but the success of "first wave" migrants made attainment of new status goals a possibility for members of all classes. Now, migration is not a last resort or a strategy for downwardly mobile people to reclaim lost status; it is "the thing to do" for young people, especially young men.

In this chapter, I investigate the subjective motivations of migrants in La Quebrada. The idealist "American Dream" theory (a la Scowcroft) and the materialist "unmet needs" theory (a la Bush) reflect two common explanations of migrant motivations: In the former, migrants are motivated by individual ambition; in the latter, altruism and social responsibility. Both of these theories have merit, but no single form of reasoning explains the complex motivations that drive migrants. There is no denying that the chance to earn U.S. wages motivates undocumented migration from Latin America; nor is there any question that electronic media have planted the seed of a mythologized America Dream in the minds of many aspiring migrants. My goal is to show how economic and cultural factors interact in everyday contexts.

Through a series of ethnographic profiles, I will present detailed examples of the motivations of a group of male migrants. I focus on the sources of information that

they consider while making decisions about migration, and I emphasize the variation in their life experiences. Even within a single community, there are many types of migrants--some leave in search of the American Dream, others want to make a quick buck and return to Honduras, and others simply migrate because it is "the thing to do" for young men. Sometimes migrants have difficulty explaining their rationales. While virtually all migrants speak of being "forced" to come to the United States by economic pressures, they also recognize that they make a choice that other people in similar situations do not make. All instances of migration contain elements of compulsion and volition, and the tension between "needs" and "wants" is a common idiom that migrants employ to describe their situations.

## **Part I. Ethnographic Profiles**

### *Wilmer Ulloa: A "Needy" Migrant*

Near the beginning of my fieldwork, a young man named Wilmer told me that he had something to show me. It was a small paper flyer (Figure 1) that someone handed to him as he got off the bus in a nearby provincial city. The flyer was printed in a money-green hue, with words printed over a picture of a bald eagle, hundred dollar bills, and an American flag. The text read, "Gane como en Estados Unidos!!" *Earn Like In The United States*. Someone had handed the flyers to all the passengers on the bus arriving from the countryside. Below the headline it said, "American Company needs people willing to improve their income to \$500 to \$1000 a month. The flyer had a woman's name and telephone number (deleted), and the name of a meeting place where interviews would be held. The flyer stated that candidates should be "dynamic," "responsible," and have a "desire to succeed." Wilmer suspected that the flyer was intended to recruit workers for a new *maquila* (sweatshop), but he wasn't



sure, and he didn't have time to go investigate. His pregnant wife was sick and he was taking her to the hospital at the moment he was handed the flyer.

I asked Wilmer if he believed what the flyer said: Could a company in need of workers pay between \$500 and \$1000 a month? "Well," he responded, "I have a cousin that works in a *maquila* making hospital scrubs for an American company. He makes about \$500 a month, so it's possible, but it's very hard to get a job there. There's no way they would need to hand out flyers to people like me."<sup>31</sup> This thing can't be true. It's probably a Korean *maquila*. They pay badly and treat people even worse. If it really paid that much, people would be lining up to work there."<sup>32</sup> The flyer appeared to be a scam. Wilmer asked me if I believed the flyer's offer, and I said, more or less, that it appeared too good to be true. We both concluded that a company that paid such high wages (by Honduran standards) would not need to go hunting for employees at the bus terminal.

I recounted stories of failures and successes that I had heard from others, hoping that at the very least, a potential migrant would be making an informed decision and not an impulsive choice based on unrealistic dreams. Unfortunately, potential migrants were usually displeased with this suggestion, and claimed that returned migrants lied about

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<sup>31</sup> "People like me" is a self-deprecating comment, drawing attention to Wilmer's lack of education and "country" way of life.

<sup>32</sup> In this context, a "Korean" *maquila* means a manufacturing facility that is owned and operated by Koreans. It could still advertise as an "American" company if it was contracted to produce goods by an American brand. Jobs in American *maquilas* (owned and operated by Americans) are generally considered preferable to work in Korean or Chinese *maquilas* because workers are treated better and the pay is higher. In Honduras, there are American companies that recruit workers for legal temporary visas (H1-B), but employers usually work through for-profit middlemen and would never resort to passing leaflets at a bus station.



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ESTADOS UNIDOS!!***

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Necesita personas dispuestas a mejorar  
sus ingresos de \$ 500 a 1,000 al mes

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- Dinámico
- Responsable
- Deseo de superación

**PRESENTARSE ENTREVISTA**

**MARTES Y JUEVES 10:00 a.m. Y 2:00 p.m.**  
**Sábado: 9:45 a.m.**  
Hotel los Andes, Salón la Cumbre

Figure 1 "Earn Like in The United States" Flyer

their experiences or dissuaded other people from migrating due to *envidia* or a desire to prevent others from attaining economic success by "holding them back."<sup>33</sup>

Wilmer and his wife had just had their first child, and they wanted to live in a home of their own. As it was, they lived in a tiny dirt-floored wattle and daub shack with Wilmer's father, younger brother, older sister, and niece.<sup>34</sup> Their home was crowded and had no electricity or running water, not because they were unavailable in the neighborhood, but because the family could not afford these services and did not consider them to be necessities. The family owned about five acres of land, on which they grew maize, beans, squash, cucumbers, onions, tomatoes, and various herbs. They had a plot of coffee, but they could not fertilize it, and the plants were old and unproductive. The coffee plot provided a tiny income, as Wilmer said, "hardly more than the cost of the sacks for the harvest."

Wilmer's only assets were a mule, a saddle, and a wristwatch that had been sent to him by a cousin who lived in New York City. He dropped out of school at fifteen, and could not read or write. Even by the standards of La Quebrada, he and his family lived a simple, self-sufficient lifestyle, yet they required cash for medicine, school supplies, shoes, clothes, cooking oil, and other necessities. To earn cash, Wilmer would slaughter hogs owned by others, and would walk around town taking orders for the fresh pork in exchange for a percentage of the sales. He was an exuberant, warm,

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<sup>33</sup> Sarah Mahler (1995) describes "envidia" as a pervasive trope in Salvadoran's discussions of migration. The concept of envy is a major subtopic in the ethnography of village life in Mesoamerica and rural communities in Spain.

<sup>34</sup> Neo-local postmarital residence is preferred, but people in La Quebrada do not follow strict preferences about whether the couple should reside near the bride or groom's family. The new couple resides near whichever family has a more comfortable, convenient space or needs domestic labor power. There is no clear rule about postmarital residence.

and funny person--a charming salesman--and I used to enjoy going door to door with him to sell the portions of *pierna* (leg) and *costilla* (ribs). He thought that the presence of a *gringo* would make people more willing to buy, and I would make up humorous little jingles or rhymes in Spanish to make people laugh. He paid me in fresh *chicharrones* (pork cracklings) to go with him, and I gladly accepted, not only because I liked the *chicharrones*, but because this task enabled me to meet many people in town in an informal and light-hearted way. I had heard of many unique strategies that anthropologists used to establish rapport in the field, but door-to-door pork salesman was not on the list.

Wilmer felt that farming his family's plot and working as a butcher-for-hire could not provide enough money for him to establish a home of his own. He had taken on small amounts of debt from kin in order to pay for his wife's medical care during her pregnancy. In the past, he would have been able to earn some money by picking coffee during the harvest and by selling his own coffee crop, but due to the coffee crisis, this type of work would not provide him with enough cash for basic expenses, let alone the repayment of debt. In 2002 and 2003, a hundred pounds of coffee cherries sold for about five dollars, and his plot provided about five-hundred pounds. Twenty-five dollars does not last long, so Wilmer and the rest of the family picked coffee on other people's farms. Coffee pickers were paid about two-dollars per hundred pounds, which worked out to between four and eight dollars a day for a skilled picker. The harvest only lasted a few months, though, and not every day had a plentiful pickings. The family earned most of the year's income this way, but it was not nearly enough for Wilmer to move into his own home with his wife and child.

Wilmer told me that he was considering several options to improve his situation. The first would be to sell his mule and use the money to move to the city of San Pedro Sula to seek work in a meat-packing plant or *maquila*, using his cousin as a connection. The other option would be to go to the U.S. *mojado* and try to work there.<sup>35</sup> He had heard that some people had found work in slaughterhouses or poultry-processing plants (Striffler 2002a), and reasoned that if he was going to do that sort of work, which he enjoyed, he might as well do it in the US, where he could get paid far more than he would in Honduras.

He considered the danger and expense of making the trip to the U.S. (about \$100 dollars, by his optimistic estimate), and was going back and forth about whether he should risk his life and separate from his family in order to seek work in the US. He knew that he could not afford to pay a *coyote*, so the chances of successful migration were slim. Most people who travel with a good *coyote* arrive in the U.S. on their first attempt, but it often takes solo migrants several attempts to cross the border. More importantly, his father was getting old and was increasingly unable to perform household chores. Wilmer's teenage brother could pick up some of the slack if he was gone, but maintaining the *milpa*, which was five miles out of town, was too hard a task for one person.

He also openly worried that someone would try and seduce his young wife while he was gone, and he launched into an unusual violent tirade about what he would do to the man that did so, telling me how he would come back from the States and bash the

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<sup>35</sup> Mojado (lit. wet) has become an acceptable slang term for "undocumented." Although the English version of the term "wet" or "wet-back" is derogatory, Hondurans use it to describe themselves in an ironic way. See the cartoon in Figure 2 for an example from one of the country's mainstream newspapers.

man's head open with a brick. The mere thought of adultery sent him into a rage that was completely out of character, offering a glimpse into some of the deeper fears and drives that influenced his decision.

One evening, Wilmer and I were talking about his plans to migrate. I had just read in the news that a tractor trailer filled with undocumented migrants from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala had been abandoned in the Texas desert by a human smuggler. The whole smuggling operation was directed by a young Honduran woman named Karla Chavez. Seventeen people died of heat or suffocation, including one Honduran. Two children from nearby communities were among the 54 people who survived the tragedy.<sup>36</sup> One migrant had made a cell phone call to authorities from inside the trailer, but none of the operators could speak Spanish and the desperate plea for help was ignored. I expected Wilmer to be outraged, but he was blasé:

Wilmer: It's sad, but everyone knows it's a risk to go to the U.S. *mojado* (illegally, lit. 'wet'). They just had a bad coyota (fem. coyote).

Dan: Does this make you think twice about migrating? Are you worried?

Wilmer: Look. Life here is risky. When bad people get desperate, there is violence here. Do you know how many shootings there were here after Hurricane Mitch? Every night you could hear *pa pa pa*, coming from the countryside. I've been in machete fights.[Shows me a scar on his arm] Of course it's worth the risk. Is it any more dangerous than staying here?

He continued to describe the risks involved in moving to a Honduran city:

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<sup>36</sup> This was the infamous "Victoria 19" tragedy, which occurred on May 14, 2003 and was well-publicized by the U.S. media. Journalist Jorge Ramos has written a book on this event, *Dying to Cross: The Worst Immigrant Tragedy in American History* (2005).

Daniel: Why don't you look for work in the city?

Wilmer: Have you been to Choloma? [The rapidly-growing northern city where many migrants from the country go to find work in maquilas] It's filled with gangs. There's a lot of violence...delinquency... and it's expensive to live there. You have to buy your food and pay someone to wash your clothes. Life is hard there. A lot of bad people and violence. It's hard to make it to the US, but at least life there is tranquilo, and in a couple of years you can come back here and live well (snapping his wrist for emphasis).

Wilmer weighed the risks of illegal immigration against his prospects in Honduras, and felt that it was worth the risk to set out for the US. He had modest goals compared to many other potential migrants in La Quebrada. He wasn't looking to buy a car or a mansion; he desired a humble home and a set of pots, pans, and dishes to outfit it. He didn't think that he could achieve this goal by working in Honduras, so he thought about going to the U.S. for a year or two. This wasn't an easy decision. He would have to leave his family and risk being placed in a Mexican prison or U.S. detention center if he was apprehended *en route*.

Theoretically, Wilmer could either migrate to the U.S. or to a Honduran city to achieve his goals. Both options require one to pull up roots and move to a potentially dangerous new environment. Staying within Honduras has the benefit of cultural familiarity and proximity to kin, but with the ever-growing number of Hondurans in the US, migrants do not feel like they will be totally isolated in the US. The higher wages in the U.S. outweigh the advantages of staying in Honduras. The newspaper cartoon reproduced in Figure 2 nicely summarizes the rationale of many would-be migrants. Here, a man thinks to himself, "I know that if I migrate to the U.S. illegally there is a good possibility that I will lose my life." Then, he looks at the menacing faces of crime and misery, depicted wearing the shaved hairstyles and undershirts favored by gang-members, and the "paquetazo" (a series of consumer tax increases

passed in 2003 under the guidance of the IMF), depicted wearing a dark-suit and sunglasses. He wonders what would happen if he stays in Honduras, implying that the risks may be worse than those encountered as a *mojado*.

Wilmer did not see any way to improve his situation without leaving La Quebrada. He thought that organic coffee farming could possibly help, but with coffee prices so low, this was a risky proposition, and it would take several years to yield any benefits, if it did at all. No one in La Quebrada had succeeded with organic production, while the new homes built with migrant wealth were testament to the success of the migrant alternative. In general, he saw no future in coffee farming, given the low prices and the poor condition of his plot.

My conversations with Wilmer continued over several months, because I eventually moved across the road from him. As I got to know him further, I realized that a rational consideration of material risk and reward was only a part of his decision-making process. In fact, the thought of leaving Honduras for the U.S. inspired a sense of guilt that manifested itself in several ways.

One night, while Wilmer was in the middle of his deliberations about migration, he knocked on my door. I was typing notes and drinking whiskey from a plastic cup. Wilmer sheepishly asked me for a drink, and I offered him a small cupful of scotch. "Don't tell my sister or my wife," he said. He and his relatives were devout Evangelical Christians, who were vehemently opposed to vices like tobacco and alcohol.



« DIA A DIA »  
CON LUIS CHAVEZ



Figure 2: Cartoon from *El Tiempo*, May 2003, drawn by Luis Chavez

If they found out that he was drinking, they would admonish him, and he would have to publicly ask for forgiveness in church. Wilmer then revealed some personal information that was not prompted by my own questions:

Wilmer: Is it true that a lot of Hondurans get addicted to drugs or alcohol in the US?

Daniel: I don't know. What have you heard?

Wilmer: The son of Doña Sandra went to jail. He was drunk and stabbed the owner of his apartment in New Jersey. There was a group of guys there from here, and they were all drunk, making lots of noise at night. The landlord came in and told them to stop and Doña Sandra's son stabbed him...I heard that the solitude there and the hard work makes you drink...Plus, you have money in your pocket to buy drinks. Some people can't resist, and they drink away all the money they make. They can't send anything here or bring anything back because of vices.<sup>37</sup>

Wilmer did not drink often because he fought off the urge and could not afford to buy alcohol. His question about alcoholism among migrants was a reflection of his own fears and an acknowledgment of his own weaknesses. He wondered whether he could resist the temptation to drink if he went to the US, had some money in his pocket, and was apart from his family and the church, whose strict regulations and emphasis on guilt kept him in line. He was not an alcoholic, but wondered what might happen if he could afford to drink. How could he resist?

For three days after our conversation, I barely saw Wilmer. He started going to church again and stayed away from my house. I asked his cousin what was going on, and found out that Wilmer's sister had suspected that he was drinking at my house. When Wilmer indulged, he became guilt-ridden, and he attended church the next day with the rest of his family. He considered his own weaknesses and how he would react to

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<sup>37</sup> One of the most disparaging things a person could say about a male returnee was "No traje nada." (He didn't bring anything back.) A migrant needed to return with material commodities that provided proof of his hard work, or he was considered a failure.

life, as he imagined it, in the US, and this fear of social isolation played into his own decision-making process. Certainly, he was afraid of the dangers of traveling to the U.S. *mojado*, but he was equally worried about what would happen once he arrived. Wilmer saw his family as a source of restraint, support, and order that would not be able to help him in the US. He would be on his own.

About a week after the drinking discussion, Wilmer told me that he had changed his mind. He decided to look for work in a Honduran city instead of migrating to the US. He could sell his mule and pawn his watch, and use the money to move to San Pedro Sula to look for work in a meat-packing plant. His cousin, who was employed, would help him find work. The money from the sale of his things would pay for travel to the city for him, his wife, and infant daughter, as well as food and rent until they got on their feet. This way, he would not have to risk his life by going to the US, and with some good fortune he could earn the money he needed. He would try to make due in Honduras before he set out for the US.

Wilmer's story exemplifies the common interpretation of migration as a product of unmet needs. Wilmer desires to move into a new residence with his family, but does not have the means to do so because of the coffee crisis and the lack of competitive employment options in Honduras. He also considered the lack of security in newly-urbanized areas. The move from country to city would be difficult, so he reasoned that a move to the United States would be preferable. After a few years of sacrifice, he believed that he could return to La Quebrada and begin a more stable, happy life with his family. His decision was not motivated by the desire for upward mobility that is taken to be part of the "American Dream." He merely wanted to maintain his status position in Honduras, and saw migration as a way to make necessary income quickly.

However, Wilmer ultimately chose *not* to migrate to the US. The specter of "greed" and the feelings of guilt that it inspired lurked behind all his decisions. His association of migration with vice and egoistic action reflect the common belief that migration is a sign of excessive self-interest and ambition, something that he tries hard to avoid. His eventual decision not to migrate to the U.S. was not based on his fear of the journey north, or a purely rational consideration of means and ends. Rather, he was worried about his own self-discipline (or lack thereof) and how he would respond from life away from family and church.

### **Moncho: A "Greedy" Migrant**

Moncho's situation is vastly different from Wilmer's. He is the only son of one of the wealthiest families in town. His father is the town's former mayor, the owner of a large coffee farm, a hotel, and the manager of a gas station. He is twenty-five, married with two children, and lives in his father's hotel, which his wife manages. He cannot read or write, and is known among the townsfolk as the quintessential *haragán*, a lazy person who feels he is above manual labor. His disgusted father--an "up by your bootstraps" individualist--refuses to support him financially, much to the delight of members of the town's gossip ring, who seem to get inordinate pleasure watching the family fall to Earth. I recall an occasion when the rotund Moncho tried to hide from his dad by lying on his back in the bed of a pickup truck so that he would not be seen as we cruised through town on our way to a lazy afternoon of leisure. Moncho's belly poked up above the rails of the pickup bed, so that the people on the sides of the street pointed and laughed, his big ponch giving away the fact that he was whiling away the day, drinking with friends.

He was a jolly, self-deprecating person, and led an outwardly care-free life in La Quebrada. Nevertheless, he faced the burden of high expectations from his family, and failed to live up to his father's hopes. He rarely worked, and was not skilled enough to be trusted with the family businesses. The fact that he relied on his wife economically was especially humiliating. Arriving in the United States provided a chance for him to start over again and make money quickly. He dreamed of returning home triumphantly, disproving his father and all of the other people in town who thought of him as a humorous, benign, and somewhat pathetic figure. He was willing to perform any task available to him in the US, and had many friends there who would help him find work. He thought that he could work for two or three years in the U.S. and return to La Quebrada as a "success"--with a new home and car for his family.

One evening in June, in the middle of the "dead season" between coffee harvests, I was standing on a street-corner with Moncho and a group of friends, drinking, and he declared his desire to migrate once again. "Puchale. Me voy pa' los yunai, compa," he said with feigned exasperation, kicking a rock against the concrete wall of the *municipalidad*, penalty-kick style. "La situación aquí está tremenda." [Damn man, I'm heading for the States. The situation is bad here.] "Que voy a hacer, acá? Cortar café? Mejor que limpie baños en los Estados." [What am I gonna do here? (Wait several months to) Pick coffee? I'd be better off cleaning bathrooms in the States] he asked to no one in particular. Moncho's friends gave him a hard time about not being able to successfully migrate to the US, but they all sympathized with him. They all had attempted to emigrate illegally or were considering doing so.

Moncho tried to migrate illegally five times without success, only twice making it as far as Mexico City without being apprehended by immigration authorities. A month after making his declaration to me, he embarked on his sixth try, and scrounged up the cash to pay a *coyote* to help him pass through southern Mexico by boat, instead of going by bus or on foot. This required him to borrow substantial amounts of money from friends and sell off some inherited coffee land to pay for the trip. He had taken on tremendous financial risk this time, in addition to the physical risk that always accompanies the journey from Honduras to the US. His wife was vehemently opposed to the idea. She felt that Moncho should remain with the family and be satisfied with his life in La Quebrada. She worried about being alone with the children in the hotel, wondering what Moncho was up to. She realized that Moncho was determined to go saying to me, "At this point, after such a great effort, he is going to leave. He won't listen to anyone."

Moncho left with a group of about twenty men, traveling with a female smuggler who was known for having a high rate of success. Moncho called home *en route*, once from Chiapas, and then from Reynosa, on the Texas border, the night before he was to cross to the US. The next couple of days were tense, as Moncho's wife waited to hear whether he had crossed successfully. I was sitting in the town's internet center when she wife arrived in tears. She had gotten word from the *coyote* that Moncho had indeed crossed the Rio Grande, but had been apprehended by U.S. immigration and sent back across the border. He attempted to cross again, but was apprehended and placed in the *corralón*, a migrant detention center near Brownsville, Texas. She tried to call some relatives in Texas for help using an internet phone, and she spoke with the *coyote* to find out what was going on.

Moncho had used a false identity the second time he was caught by migration authorities. He later told me that he claimed to be Mexican so that he would not be deported all the way back to Honduras. He was transferred from the *corralón* to the Rolling Plains Jail and Detention Center near Dallas, a newly constructed facility that receives overflow from the border zones.<sup>38</sup> He spent four months in prison, eventually being sent back to Honduras by plane.

He returned to La Quebrada a different person. His time in prison hardened his body and darkened his skin. He tried to sustain the jolly, self-deprecating, care-free personality for which he was known, but he did not have the same spirit as before. His friends mocked him about being sexually abused in prison and said that he looked like a *campesino*, due to his muscles and sun-darkened skin. He never told me the details of his time in prison, and what he did reveal was always tempered with sarcasm and humor. He clearly was distancing himself from the ordeal.

In addition to facing shame, physical hardship, and psychological trauma, he had spent his life savings on an unsuccessful journey. He no longer had hopes to one day make it to the States, and began to work full-time in a coffee *beneficio* (mill), performing the taxing manual labor that he despised. He was happy to be safely reunited with his family after such a traumatic ordeal, but he had the air of a defeated, broken person. He told me that he would never try to migrate again.

Surprisingly, Moncho's story was *not* taken as a cautionary tale by would-be migrants. It was perceived as one of Moncho's characteristic failures, something that would not

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<sup>38</sup> According to an AP news story, employees of this jail alleged that prisoners were inhumanly treated and were denied basic prisoners' rights ("Federal Officials Investigating Inmate Complaints" April 15, 2004, AP State and Local Wire)

have happened to a more quick-witted person. One of Moncho's best friends, Jorge, was not at all phased by what had happened. He decided to migrate only a few weeks after learning that Moncho had been apprehended.

### **Jorge Orellana: The Itch to Go**

Like Wilmer, Jorge comes from a landless family. His father is mute, and both his parents sell produce at a roadside stand, which is among the lowest-status jobs in Honduras. He is a twenty-three year old high school dropout with great intelligence and creativity, but he suffers from a lack of self-control that alienated his teachers and eventually led to his departure from school.

I once asked him why he wanted to go to the US, and he gave me the standard response: He was only earning forty lempira a day (about \$2.50 US) and that just wasn't enough. He heard about the money his cousin Santos had made in Long Island, and saw the beautiful new home that Santos had constructed using earnings he sent home to Honduras. He wanted a shot at success, and it didn't matter what type of work he would have to do. I asked him if, hypothetically, he was paid a hundred lempira a day in Honduras, instead of forty. Would he still want to leave? If low income really was the cause, how much income was necessary to suppress the desire to migrate? He said, "A hundred would help, but it won't let you buy a house or a car. I would still try and go."

As it turned out, he was able to prove his hypothesis. I helped him get a steady job in the town's brand-new internet center that paid about a hundred lempira a day. He seemed happy in his job. Although the days were tedious, it was year-round, full-time, employment, almost unheard of in La Quebrada, especially for an undereducated



person from an unremarkable family. He got to work in the most flashy, outwardly modern business in town, and was earning much more money than he ever had before. However, he had to follow a strict schedule, work late into the night, and obey the rules set by his bosses--demands that challenged his undisciplined and erratic personality.

After only a few months of work at the internet center, Jorge informed me that he was going to use the money he had saved to go to the US. I was surprised, because I assumed that his stable employment would keep him from leaving. Defending his decision, he summed up his desire to migrate by saying: "I can't explain it to you. Once the itch to go [to the US] hits you, there's just no way that you can be happy here." He was defending himself by admitting that he could not explain his desire to leave in rational terms--he just wanted to go.

Jorge is the clearest example of a poor migrant whose decision was influenced by exposure to Western media. Even before he began to work at the internet center, he was lured by the bright lights of American pop culture, and sitting on the internet all day made "the itch" even stronger. He knew all the words to rap songs by Eminem. He and I talked about the contestants on the reality TV show "Lucha Para Sobrevivir" (*Survivor*), and he watched action movies on Cinemax nightly on a friend's television. Once he started working at the internet center, he spent most of the day in online chat rooms with people from all over Latin America. Incredibly, he mastered reading and writing by spending hours in online chat-sessions. He developed friendships and inconsequential romances with people from around the world, and pop culture was the common denominator in their initial social interactions. They would talk about music,

TV, film, and sports to break the ice, and eventually these topics would give way to more personal ones, like family, love, and friendship.

The internet provided a way for Jorge to live out fantasies of upward mobility. The ability to use the internet makes clear statement about status in rural Honduras (less so in urban areas). First, in order to be online, one must be able to read and write; Second, one must live in a community with electricity; Third, one must have the money and skill to use the internet. Therefore, the simple act of being online suggests that a person is not an illiterate peasant, and has some education and access to resources.<sup>39</sup> This is part of the reason why internet romances are so popular in rural Honduras--"undesirables" are weeded out by the requirements of the medium of interaction. In a country where about 40% of adults in rural communities are non-literate, and only about 50% of households have electricity,<sup>40</sup> the ability to access the internet is a sign of worldliness and refinement. In a limited way (albeit one that was very meaningful to him) Jorge was able to transcend his status position in Honduras by interacting online.

Jorge started an online relationship with a young woman from the small city of El Progreso in the northern part of the country. They chatted for hours each day for about a month. Finally, they decided that they would meet in person on Valentine's Day. Jorge shined his shoes, borrowed a slick suitcase, put on his best clothes, and took the bus to El Progreso to meet his *novia de pantalla* (on-screen girlfriend) and her family. The family met him at the bus-stop, and the girl's sister accompanied them on their date. They saw *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* in a movie

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<sup>39</sup> An hour online in an internet café cost between 10 and 15 lempira (70-80 cents) in 2003-2004.

<sup>40</sup> The rural literacy figure (63% literacy) comes from USAID's 2000 Congressional Report. The electricity figure comes from the World Bank's "Honduras Country Assistance Strategy" 2003.

theater (Jorge's second time ever in a theater) and ate lunch at Pizza Hut (Her father gave her money for the date). He spent the evening with her family, and came back to La Quebrada happier than I had ever seen him. He told me he was in love, but it was hard to tell whether he was in love with the woman or the fantasies of Western modernity she helped him live out. All of this became moot about a month later, however, when she broke off the relationship.

Jorge was dejected, and decided it was time to try to migrate to the U.S. once again. He had tried to immigrate a year before, and he knew the risks involved. This time, he viewed migration as a personal challenge. In his previous attempt, he had made it just over the Guatemalan/Mexican border before he was caught in a freight train and deported after spending the night in a Mexican jail. He experienced a violent, frightful trip in the train, during which a group of Salvadoran women were raped in a boxcar nearby. When he was caught by the Mexican police, Jorge claims the officer mockingly told him he was paid three-hundred dollars by the U.S. government for every migrant he apprehended. Jorge laughed and told the officer, "You'll be making a lot of money off me then, because I'll be back until I make it."

Jorge obviously knew the risks that migrants faced. He had stable, relatively lucrative employment in Honduras, but he was a dreamer, and the internet and television fueled his dreams of instant gratification. It would be far too simplistic, however, to only focus on the media as the source of his impressions of life in the US. His cousin Santos played an important role as well.

## **Santos Orellana: The Model of Migrant Success**

Jorge's idea of life in the U.S. was strongly influenced by the experience of his cousin Santos. In 1996, at the age of eighteen, Santos left La Quebrada for the US. He was from the same socioeconomic position as Jorge, and worked as a *jornalero* (day-laborer) before he left. He traveled without a *coyote*, and nearly died of exhaustion in the deserts of Northern Mexico while trying to reach the US. In a conversation with me, he claimed to have survived by drinking horse urine and stealing mangos from street vendors. In public, he bragged about the speed and ease with which he reached the States, and the fact that, unlike the wealthy, he didn't need a *coyote* to cross the border.

Santos quickly found work in the in the US. He worked in a chain of upscale delis in Long Island, starting off making less than three dollars an hour. Six years later, after working seventy hours a week for the same business, he was making almost twelve dollars an hour and had saved enough to construct a small, well-furnished home in La Quebrada. He timed his return so that his new home was ready when he arrived, and he brought with him a gas range, television, stereo system, and barbeque grill. His home seemed to mimic the style of the Long Island suburbs where he had lived. Unlike the large homes owned by the coffee elite, his was not surrounded by a large gate. It had a neat yard that abutted the street and a small fence to keep out animals, but Santos did not construct the imposing barricades that most of the large homes have, in the style of the Spanish *hacienda*. Santos told me that his house didn't need a gate because, "[He doesn't] have to worry about being robbed. [He] was once a *jornalero*."

Santos epitomized the triumphant return that many migrants dream about. Only three months after returning, he married a beautiful nineteen year-old girl. His wedding was the dramatic climax of his American success story. Almost everyone in town attended the service, whether they were invited or not. Truck after truck arrived at the church, their beds crammed with standing passengers. Townspeople milled about outside and crowded the interior. Gawking teens peered through the church's glassless window to get a glimpse of the service. Santos was dressed in a handsome black tuxedo that he brought back from the United States, and the bride wore a sleek, modern, white gown. At the reception, members of the groom's extended family passed around little cocktail franks on toothpicks. They poured Pepsi from two-liter bottles into plastic cups and distributed them to the guests. Instead of tortillas, they served sliced white bread to accompany *carne asada* and refried red beans. The couple danced to American pop songs--not a single song with Spanish lyrics was played. After the wedding, Santos was accused of being "addicted" to everything American and some felt that his wedding was an over-the-top expression of his new American identity. It was the type of event that a *jornalero* could hardly imagine before the days of U.S. migration, and it was a very public display of Santos' new status as a successful returnee. For the dozens of young men who watched the wedding through the windows of the church, the message was clear: Undocumented migration can help you live your dreams.

On another occasion, I was sitting with young Jorge in Santos' plush new home, watching a videotape of the Dominican film, *Nueva Yol* (Muñiz 1995), a tragicomedy about life as an undocumented migrant in New York. In one of the film's scenes, Fellito, a smooth-talking Puerto Rican friend of the protagonist, Balbuena, tells him that, "In New York, the dollars fly around the street like lettuce...Arriving in New

York is like arriving in heaven." Santos laughed and said, "Así piensa todo el mundo acá" [That's what everyone thinks here.] Then looking at his young cousin, who lay prone on the couch watching TV, and was planning to leave for the States within a month, he said, "No es cierto. Allá, la vida es muy dura." [It's not true. Life is hard there.]

Santos had been discouraging Jorge from migrating for some time. Later, I asked Jorge if he would heed the advice. "Look," he told me, "He (Santos) says it's so hard there, but he has a furnished home, a car, cows (counting off the assets on his fingers). He has no reason to complain." [Mire. Él me dice que es tan dura la vida allá. Pues, él tiene casa amueblada, carro, vacas. No tiene por que quejarse.] For Jorge, the economic ends justified the means, no matter what his cousin said.

Two months later, I received an instant message from Jorge, saying that he was stuck in a small town in Chiapas, working for food in the safe-house of a *coyote*. Mexican migration authorities were patrolling the town looking for migrants, and he wanted to return to Honduras. He promised me that he would go back to work at the internet center and admitted that he had made a mistake. He claimed to have contracted dengue fever (a lie) to play on my sympathies. I wired him fifty dollars to use as bus fare to get back to Honduras. He returned to La Quebrada a week later, and soon went back to his old job at the internet center.

The fitting coda to this story is that Santos Orellana, the epitome of the migrant dream, decided to return to Long Island after only six months in La Quebrada. He was bored, running low on money, and not as happy in his dream home as he thought he would be. He paid a *coyote* to go back to the US, and began working at the deli again. His

wife felt scared and lonely in the big new home, and moved back in with her mother. The home that Santos had spent six years saving--the clearest symbol of the fact that he had "made it"--was left unoccupied.

These profiles provide a sense of the complex set of factors that affect migrant behavior, and the difficulty of making generalizations about migrants' motives, even within one town. It is important to remember that all of these cases are from a backwater town, in the midst of economic crisis, in one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. Economic opportunity is, of course, the single most important factor that attracts migrants to the US, and the relative poverty of Honduras viz a viz the United States lurks in the background of all of these descriptions. However, these profiles show that different people have dramatically different goals and aspirations when they decide to migrate. In some cases, men choose to migrate (or not, in Wilmer's case) for emotional reasons. Religious values affected Wilmer's decision to stay in Honduras. Masculine honor and pride played into Wilmer, Moncho, Jorge, and Santos' decisions. Yes, migrants decide to set out for America in search of economic opportunity, but the decision to pull up roots is grounded in the relatively mundane processes of social life.

The subjects of these profiles are all men. As I mentioned earlier, far fewer women migrate and only a handful of females have returned to La Quebrada. The female returnees with whom I spoke speculated that women chose to remain in the U.S. because they have greater opportunity for economic independence there. They said that women from La Quebrada often found work as nannies, baby-sitters, or housecleaners in suburban locations. As one woman put it, "They are doing many of the same things that they do here. But there (in the US) they can get paid well for it, and they have more freedom, because men act differently there." In the "ideal"

division of labor in La Quebrada, men are responsible for providing food, either through subsistence agriculture or wage labor, while women are responsible for managing the household, childcare, cooking, and caring for the elderly. In reality, women play a much larger role in income-generation than men are willing to admit. In addition to harvesting coffee, women often work in small general stores (*pulperias*), or informally work as maids, cooks, or clothes-washers. There are a significant number of women that work in urban *maquilas* and come back to La Quebrada on weekends. These relatively mobile women tend to be unmarried. If they do have children, they leave them in the care of their mother (the child's grandmother) while they earn money in the city. I did not know of a single case in La Quebrada where a man assumed childcare duties or managed the household. Three of the female *maquila* workers I spoke with eventually used their incomes to pay for passage to the United States.

One of the interesting aspects of the relationship between gender and migration is the fact that male migrants often have to perform feminine-gendered labor while in the US. They often work as cooks, dishwashers, or janitors. And when they are at home in the US, they are surrounded by men, and have to prepare their own meals and wash their own clothes. This may partly account for the somewhat exaggerated performances of masculinity that are common among returned migrants like Santos. The time spent by male migrants in the U.S. is marked by a temporary inversion of gender norms that is somewhat humiliating (Boehm 2003). This temporary embarrassment fuels the males' desire to return and live the life of a successful *señor* in La Quebrada.

With some over-simplification, migrants in La Quebrada can be placed into the following three categories: *altruistic migrants*, *anomic migrants*, and *ambitious*



migrants<sup>41</sup>. *Altruistic migrants* (like Wilmer) are motivated by a desire to support kin. Individual self-advancement, beyond the immediate needs of the family, is not important. They do not seek the "American Dream" of unlimited upward mobility. *Anomic migrants*, like Moncho and Jorge, are frustrated with their lives and feel disconnected from family and community. They migrate because they seek to prove their worth to others (as in Moncho's case) or simply because they are bored and dissatisfied with their future prospects (as in Jorge's case). *Ambitious migrants* are more likely to pursue upward mobility and material wealth. In La Quebrada, they tend not to seek long-term success in the US. Rather, they seek to earn as much money as quickly as possible, and to return to Honduras to live a high-status lifestyle, following the model of "labor migrants" developed by Portes and Rumbaut (1996). The "American Dream" for them, is a triumphant return to a new home La Quebrada after years of toil in the US. Santos is the best example of this type.

These categories are abstractions that I have created for analytical purposes. However, they are similar to categories that people in La Quebrada use to describe migrants. The decision to leave one's community in search of money can either be seen as a profoundly individualistic act or an altruistic one, and in La Quebrada, people separate migrants into two categories--the "needy" and "greedy." For "needy" people, migration is considered a socially acceptable action, but for "greedy" people, it is an egoistic act that threatens the survival of the community. As I will argue in the following chapter, these native generalizations about migrant "types" reveal basic principles of individuality and sociality in La Quebrada.

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<sup>41</sup> The first two categories are, of course, references to Durkheim's typology of suicide. I am not trying to draw an analogy between migration and suicide. The terms are similar only on the most superficial level.

## Chapter 3

### The Needy, the Greedy, and the Lazy

In the previous chapter, I used individual ethnographic profiles to demonstrate that migrants from La Quebrada come from all social classes and migrate for a variety of complex reasons. All of the people I described believed that migration would improve their life situations. However, they had to balance the potential benefits of migration with physical risks and the negative consequences of emigration for their families and communities. Migrants had to leave their families behind in search of income, and this produced strong feelings of guilt. Male migrants often faced an intractable dilemma: They couldn't provide economically for their families without leaving Honduras, yet by leaving Honduras they would be abandoning their families, crops, churches and neighborhoods. Economic survival threatened social reproduction.<sup>42</sup>

There is great confusion and ambivalence over whether migration should be seen as a positive or negative change for La Quebrada. Everyone in La Quebrada recognized that some individuals and families had indeed prospered from migrant earnings and remittances, but most agreed that a migrant economy was not a viable substitute for coffee farming, or some other local economic base. Migrant wealth was concentrated in new homes or vehicles. It may have helped a few local businesses (e.g. home construction and retail shops), but migrants did not invest in productive industries, and therefore did not employ many people, keeping the remitted income within a small group. Remittances did not produce a long-term economic base for the town's majority. Without an economic base, the children of migrants would have to migrate

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<sup>42</sup> Coffee production was secondary to the lumber industry in La Quebrada until the early seventies, so by using the term "social reproduction," I am not implying that people are resistant to change per se. They would welcome any new productive activity, as long as it allowed basic social processes to continue: e.g. marriage, child-rearing, care for the elderly.

in order to maintain their standard of living, threatening the community's survival as parents separated from their children, elderly parents, and other extended kin. On balance, I found that people tended to see migration as a negative phenomenon. Migration was an understandable way for people to cope with the coffee crisis, it had been beneficial for a fortunate few, but it was a short-term source of income that threatened the long term survival of the community.

People expressed their ambivalence about migrant dependency in the idioms they used to describe migrants. Male migrants were often described as "haragán" (lazy person, loafer) and "ambicioso" (greedy, selfish, overly ambitious). Some people migrated out of necessity (*migrantes de necesidad*), but they were exceptions to the general pattern. The specific ways that people distinguished between negatively-valued "lazy" and "greedy" migrants, and neutral or positively-valued "needy" migrants demonstrate the ways that people perceive migration as a conflict between the needs of the individual and the needs of the group.

Before I can continue this argument, it is necessary to place the previous chapter's micro-level descriptions of migration in regional and historical context. Without a wider perspective, it would be impossible to understand the meaning of migration to local people. Local criticisms of migrant "greed" are directly tied to the rapidly rising economic power of young migrants throughout Honduras. Unfortunately, Honduras/US migration is a topic that has been virtually ignored by scholars until recently, so I will shift to a wider focus to put the experience of La Quebrada into regional context.

## **Honduran Migration to the U.S. in Comparative Perspective**

The Honduran community in the U.S. is one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the country. From the 1990 Census to the 2000 U.S. Census, the official population of Hondurans in the U.S. rose from 130,000 to 217,000, an increase of 67%. Since 1998, undocumented Honduran migrants have been arriving to the U.S. at a rapid rate. In 2002, there were more migrants from Honduras (11,033) apprehended at the U.S. border than from any other country besides Mexico (INS Statistical Yearbook 2002). The INS estimated the unauthorized Honduran population in the U.S. to be 138,000 in 2000, which represented a threefold increase since 1990 (INS Statistical Yearbook 2001), and made it the fifth largest--and the fastest growing--population of undocumented recent immigrants in the country.

Honduran migration patterns differ from the more well-known cases of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua for many reasons, the most important being the political situation of Honduras in the 1980s. Honduras did not *directly* experience widespread civil war and massive peasant displacement in the eighties. Although the country was deeply affected by the wars in neighboring countries (as described in Chapter IV), warfare was not an immediate cause of emigration, as it was in other countries during that time. Migration from Honduras did not really take off until the 1990s. Using EWI data from the INS (see Figure 3), it is clear that undocumented Honduran immigration has risen steadily since 1987, peaked after Hurricane Mitch in FY 1999, and has remained at a high level since then.

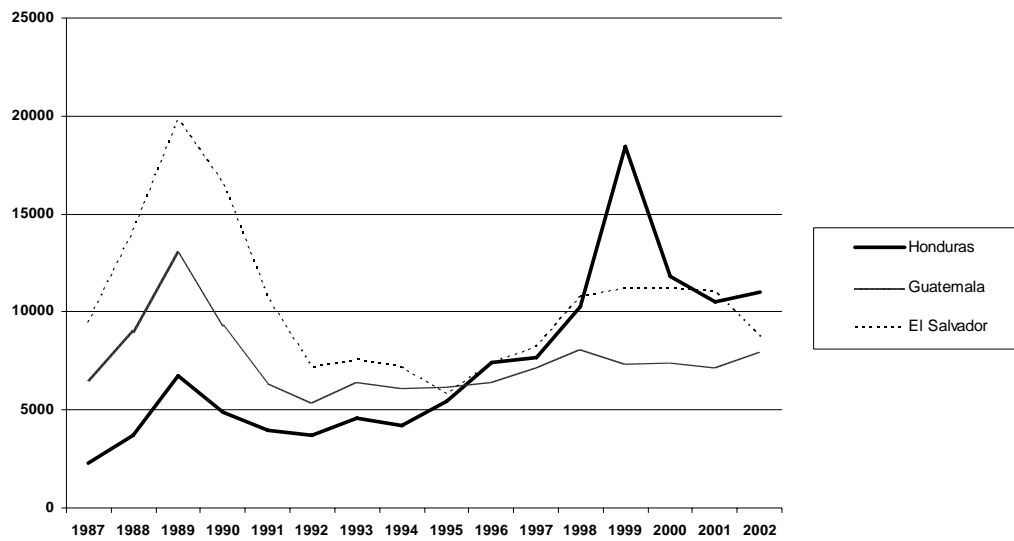


Figure 3 Entries Without Inspection, 1987-2002

Source: Statistical Handbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

For the sake of analytical clarity, I separate the history of US/Honduran migration into three phases, 1950-1990, 1992-1999, and Post-Hurricane Mitch (1999 to the present). Although there were small amounts of immigration from Honduras to the U.S. before 1951, INS statistics show a significant jump in migration from all of Central America during the fifties. Unfortunately, Central American countries other than El Salvador were pooled together in INS reports at that time, so it is difficult to determine exact numbers of migrants. Nancie Gonzalez reports that the international linkages formed during the heyday of the Honduran banana economy (pre-1960) were key to the pre-1990s patterns of migration (Gonzalez 1988). According to Gonzalez, many migrants were members of the Garífuna ethnic group who worked on the banana boats or in other parts of the fruit industry, and made connections with U.S. citizens through business interactions. Also, the local mercantile class tied to the banana trade developed bonds with Americans, and some ended up migrating. This led to the creation of a significant Honduran community in New Orleans, the most important port for banana shipments from Honduras. As Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla argue for the case of El Salvador, it is likely that the pre-1990s migrants were mainly middle-class Hondurans who had attained some professional skills working in US-run industries, including the banana trade (Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 2001:29, Puerta 2003). These people most likely worked in the domestic-service or industrial sectors, or facilitated the fruit import/export business in the US.

For most of the past century, the Honduran economy was dominated by the production of bananas for export, an industry that was centered in the northern part of the country, along the Caribbean coast. The banana industry was in a state of prolonged decline from the 1960s on, and during that time, the Honduran coffee industry rose in

importance. As LaFeber (1983) and Euraque (1996a) note, the export-oriented cattle and cotton industries also boomed during the 1960s and 1970s, causing large-scale peasant displacement, mainly in the southern part of the country. However, unlike in El Salvador, where this process led the displaced peasantry to emigrate to Honduras or the U.S. (Hamilton and Stoltz Chinchilla 1991; Mahler 1995), it mainly led to internal migration in Honduras, where industrial development in the northern part of the country attracted rural workers.

Because the social pressures caused by large-scale export agriculture (especially cotton production) were more severe in El Salvador than in Honduras, many Salvadoran peasants immigrated to the Honduran countryside during the sixties. According to LaFeber (1983:175), 300,000 Salvadorans had entered Honduras by 1969. The influx of Salvadorans into Honduras, and the consequent expulsion of 15,000-20,000 Salvadoran migrants (Euraque 1996a:141), led El Salvador to invade Honduras in July of 1969, the beginning of the so-called Soccer War.<sup>43</sup> El Salvador occupied 1,600 square kilometers of land in southern Honduras, but it was quickly forced to withdraw its troops by the Organization of American States (Euraque 1996a:140).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of the maquila sector led to some movement back to urban areas such as San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, especially the former, where most light-manufacturing was based. Because Honduras is less densely populated than El Salvador and Guatemala, land-tenure issues and urban overcrowding have been a less severe problem in Honduras than in these countries. Although many

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43 See Euraque (1996a) and LaFeber (1983) on the origins of the Soccer War. LaFeber writes that "about 130,000" Salvadorans returned to El Salvador after the war (176).

Hondurans have been forced onto marginal mountainous land by agro-industrial expansion, Honduras does not have the population pressures that led to widespread migration to the U.S. from El Salvador or Guatemala. Honduran immigration rates were far lower than those of neighboring countries during this period. Internal migration, from country to city and back again, was far more common in Honduras than migration to the US.

The second phase of Honduran migration occurred from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, and was chiefly related to a major drop in coffee prices caused by the demise of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, and the passage of the three U.S. laws, IRCA in 1986, the Immigration Act of 1990, and the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. The 1986 law allowed for the legalization of people who had resided in the U.S. since 1982, and the 1990 law expanded the preference quotas to allow for greater numbers of people to enter the US. Although there is no direct study of the effect of these laws on immigration from Central America, the dramatic increase in the number of immigrants in the late eighties and early nineties suggests a correlation. Besides the direct influence of the expanded quotas, the rise could be due to the increased incomes that family members in the U.S. could earn after becoming permanent residents, which could provide funds for family members to immigrate. By the early nineties, many of the immigrants that came in the eighties would have become U.S. citizens, allowing their children, spouses or, in some cases, parents, to qualify for visas. According to Michael Jones-Correa (1998), more than half of the Hondurans who migrated to New York between 1982 and 1989 and became citizens were naturalized between five and nine years of residence (Jones-Correa 1998:98), and their change in legal status could partly account for the large numbers of people that immigrated in the early nineties. Between 1992 and 1996,



more than 16,000 Hondurans were naturalized as U.S. citizens, a fact that could account for a rise in "second wave" migrants, given that family preferences were greatly expanded in the 1990 Immigration Act. The 1996 law made it significantly harder for undocumented immigrants to naturalize, so naturalization rates dropped in 1997 and 1998 (INS 2001).

I did not personally encounter or hear about any migrants from La Quebrada that acquired visas through the expanded quotas, but, as legal residents, these people would be relatively unlikely to return to Honduras. The most significant cause of the wave of emigration from La Quebrada in the early nineties was the cessation of the International Coffee Agreement, and the subsequent crisis in coffee prices that occurred from 1990-1992. The coffee crisis certainly was another cause of emigration from Honduras to the U.S. in the early-nineties. Because most Honduran coffee farmers are smallholders, they would also tend to migrate illegally, which likely contributed to the spike in EWIs in the early-nineties.

Hurricane Mitch struck in October of 1998, left nearly 10,000 Hondurans dead, and led to the displacement of over a million people. In its aftermath, there was a dramatic rise in illegal immigration from Honduras, with the number of Hondurans apprehended at the southern U.S. border (Entry Without Inspection or EWI) reported by the INS rising from 10,600 to 18,800 between Fiscal Year 1998 and 1999. Legal immigration remained steady, due to the fact that the number of available visas was not expanded. After Hurricane Mitch, another severe coffee crisis (1999-2003) caused many farmers to migrate north. In 1998, Hondurans already in the U.S. were granted Temporary Protected Status that allowed them to remain legally in the U.S. until 2002.

TPS was extended in 2001 and again in 2004, so that Hondurans who arrived before January of 1998 could remain in the U.S. without fear of deportation until 2006.

Mitch damaged lowland areas, especially the tobacco and banana crops, far more seriously than it did the coffee-growing regions. Close to 90% of the banana crop was affected, leaving 17,000 workers jobless.<sup>44</sup> In the aftermath of the storm, Honduran President Carlos Flores Facussé used the fear of migration to plead for aid from the US, "warning that a new wave of migrants will go 'walking, swimming and running up north' unless the United States helps Central America get back on its feet."<sup>45</sup> The present high rates of undocumented migration show no signs of letting up. In fact, although EWI apprehensions have fallen from the Post-Mitch spike, they rose between 2000 and 2002, showing that undocumented migration from Honduras remains widespread. At present, more Hondurans are stopped at the southern border than citizens of any other country besides Mexico.

La Quebrada is now in transition from a coffee economy to one based on migrant circuits. Prior to the mid-nineties, few people in La Quebrada migrated to the United States, but since 1998, the economy has increasingly come to depend on migration. By 2003, close to five hundred townspeople were living in the United States, dispersed throughout the country, with suburban Long Island and Morristown, New Jersey being the most popular destinations. The first migrant "pioneers" used connections with the well-established Salvadoran community in Nassau County, Long Island (the same community described in Mahler 1995) in order to immigrate between 1990 and 1992. Two members of the first wave of migrants were men whose families had immigrated

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<sup>44</sup> *Migration News*, 6:01 (January 1999)

<sup>45</sup> *Migration News*, 5:12 (December 1998)

to Honduras from El Salvador in the sixties in order to work in the lumber mills. They used family connections with Salvadorans in Long Island who had emigrated during the eighties to facilitate the move and find work in a Long Island pizza parlor.

Another man was a traveling salesman who befriended a Salvadoran who was in the process of migrating while selling shoes near the Salvadoran border. He migrated in order to escape from a bad debt, and lived with a Salvadoran family in Glen Cove, New York upon arriving in the US. A woman, also from a Salvadoran family, went to live with relatives in Fort Collins, Colorado, in order to escape marital problems. Her husband moved there a year later, and there continues to be a migrant circuit between La Quebrada and Fort Collins.

The early stages of emigration from La Quebrada depended upon social connections formed between Hondurans and Salvadorans in the sixties, when large numbers of Salvadoran peasants migrated to Honduras in search of work. Despite the post-Soccer War expulsion of some Salvadorans (mainly from southern Honduras), a great number remained in places like La Quebrada. These people maintained social ties with Salvadoran kin that facilitated the early stages of migration in the nineties. By that time, the Salvadoran community in the U.S. was well-established.

To summarize, La Quebrada received large numbers of internal Honduran migrants and Salvadoran labor immigrants in the fifties, sixties, and seventies. The first wave of migration to the U.S. did not begin until the early-nineties, when people used connections with the Salvadoran community to facilitate their journey to the US, mainly as a result of the coffee crash that followed the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989. There was periodic migration throughout the nineties, mainly secondary waves of people linked by kinship or friendship to the original

"pioneers." The boom did not occur until after the Hurricane Mitch and the second coffee crash of 1999. Emigration has intensified since then, and migration is now facilitated by two human smuggling operations.

Emigration to the U.S. is a relatively new strategy to cope with economic hardship. In previous periods of low coffee prices, farmers would scale back on coffee production and plant staple crops for home consumption (Wolf 1967). Some migrated to the cities or banana regions in search of work. The damage caused by Hurricane Mitch clearly led many people to migrate, but the storm is a necessary but insufficient explanation of the rise in Honduran emigration since 1998. Hurricane Fifi, a similar storm that struck Honduras in 1974, did not lead to widespread emigration to the US, because internal migration was still the most common strategy for people to escape hardship. A combination of historical, technological, and cultural factors have made migration into a commonplace strategy to escape economic problems.

### **The Realities of Migrant Dependency in La Quebrada**

Regardless of the historical genesis of the phenomenon, migration to the U.S. is now an unavoidable aspect of life in La Quebrada, and throughout rural Honduras. There are some material reasons why this change has occurred--improved communications with urban areas in Honduras and the United States has made travel cheaper, easier, and faster. People are connected to urban centers both materially and culturally, and they measure their own life experiences against those in the wider world, as described in the previous chapter.

The new social realities of migrant dependency are visible on the front porch of *Internet Los Catrachos*, a small cinder-block building off the main square that has become the telecommunications hub of this community. The town only received electricity in 2001, and has no telephone service, but it does have two satellite internet providers, founded in 2003 by three young entrepreneurs, two of whom are returned migrants.<sup>46</sup> These businesses house a handful of computers that are used to make VOIP (internet) telephone calls to the United States.<sup>47</sup> There, on a dusty corner, sandwiched between the town hall and the dilapidated cathedral, the postmodern division of labor is made manifest in the clientele of the internet café.<sup>48</sup>

In the morning, men in their teens and twenties begin to stream in, some hopping off the backs of pickups or coffee trucks, others coming by mule or on horseback. Clutching phone numbers scrawled on balled-up scraps of paper, they ask the employee at the internet shop to call the U.S. phone number they hold in their hands. Some cannot read the numbers written on the paper, and diffidently hand the paper to the operator with a knowing glance. Others come in bunches, all pooling their money together to call a certain friend or relative in the United States--*pidiendo ayuda*--asking for help in financing their own trip to the United States. Some come from the town itself, others make the trip from the outlying villages or *caseríos*, tiny rural hamlets that are little more than exogamous kin settlements.

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<sup>46</sup> One of the owners worked for ten years on luxury cruise ships, including the Italian ship *Achille Lauro*, which was hijacked in 1985.

<sup>47</sup> The story of these computers is interesting in itself. They are late-nineties Pentium II models that were purchased at a used-equipment auction in the US, shipped to Honduras and sold for about \$200 each. The machines in *Internet Los Catrachos* have stickers on them which show that they were once the property of the Pillsbury Corporation in the US, which is part of the General Mills Co.

<sup>48</sup> I use the term internet café, although this business does not serve refreshments. The terms "ciber café," "ciber," or "café internet" are common in Honduras.

Although people come to the internet shop year round, the numbers swell between the months of April and September, when the coffee harvest has ended and there is little available work besides occasional odd jobs that might yield a couple of dollars per day or less. During this time, the desire to migrate intensifies, and crowds gather on the porch, gossiping and weighing their chances at successful migration, partly because there is nothing better to do. Sometimes the young men call a friend's work telephone number in the US, and they are reprimanded for calling while the person is on the job. Other times, the same phone number appears time and time again, distributed to all the men in a certain *barrio* or village. The calls become so tiresome that the person in the States often changes his number, turns off his phone, or just hangs up. The pleas are repetitive: *¿Primo, me puede ayudar?* [Cousin, can you help me?] *Aquí la situación es una cosa seria.* [The situation is really serious here.] *Está tremenda aquí compa.* [It's awful here, compadre.] *No tengo nada.* [I'm broke.] *¿Me manda un dinero para irme?* [Can you send me money to go?]

This part of the clientele--the regulars--was a source of comedy for the workers at the internet center. They memorized the numbers and would try to predict how many times the aspiring migrant would call before giving up. The callers could not--or would not--take a hint, and would sometimes call every day to see if someone could help them. The excuses given by people in the U.S. were another source of comedy. One of the most common excuses was to say that it was raining or snowing, and there was no work, which created the impression that people did not work in bad weather in the US. This excuse was based on the fact that many men worked in house painting, construction, or landscaping. They did not work when the weather was bad, but this excuse was used by people who clearly did not work in those occupations and merely wanted an excuse so that they would not have to send money. One day, I checked the

U.S. weather report and told the owner, returned migrant, that it was raining on the East Coast. He said:

*La gente va a decir que no hay trabajo. Para no enviar. Es lo más seguro.* [People will say that there's no work. So they don't have to send (money). That's for sure.]

Sometimes current events were used as excuses, such as the Iraq War, the East Coast blackout in August 2003, etc. The employees would guess which excuse would be popular on a given day. If a person in the U.S. used the same excuse over and over, rumors would circulate that he or she was lazy, alcoholic, or spending all of his money on a woman or man. This is a sign of the intense pressure put on migrants to produce a surplus, as described by Mahler (1995), and the ways that that migrants cope with this pressure by taking advantage of people's lack of knowledge about life in the US.

Not all calls were so futile. The more serious migrants would already have made a deal with a *coyote* and would call to arrange the logistics of payment and travel. These people tended to be relatively wealthy, and had the resources necessary to make long phone calls and pay part of the *coyote's* fee. Sometimes, returned migrants looking to go back to the States would call their old bosses and inquire about work. It was surreal experience to see a young Honduran man call a Long Island deli from an internet phone, nonchalantly ask how business was going, and inquire about whether or not he could get any shifts next month, but it was a normal part of life in La Quebrada after the arrival of the internet phone in 2002.

Virtually all the migrants from La Quebrada are undocumented. Those with some resources hire a *coyote* for anywhere from \$2000 to \$6000, depending on whether or

not a customer pays in advance or finances the trip with money earned after they arrive in the United States. Groups of friends often set out alone with little more than a few dollars in their pockets, hoping to ride the *trenes de la muerte*, freight trains that travel across Mexico. Members of this group will call relatives asking for fifty dollars, or other small forms of assistance from friends or relatives. The latter group rarely makes it to the U.S. successfully. Although some have made it, most are apprehended by Mexican police and deported. Some are injured or killed en route. I met two men who had attempted the trip ten times. Certain returnees told me that they couldn't be happy in Honduras for long. They would build up some capital by working in the States, return to Honduras to live until their money ran out, and then would return to the U.S. to repeat the process of cyclical migration. As with Santos (described in the previous chapter), locals sometimes described cyclical migrants as "addicted" to life in the United States.

By nightfall, the women start to arrive. Most are past their forties and wish to speak with sons and daughters in the States, often to arrange money transfers. A small segment consists of young mothers who bring their children in to speak with their fathers in the States. These people have pre-arranged calling times, and they know their kin's day off, what time they are at work, and when they go to sleep. They request money for diapers, baby formula, fertilizer, visits to the dentist, school supplies, and other mundane necessities. Sometimes the calls are tearful, others have the calculating feel of business transactions. Some people have never spoken over a telephone before. Elderly gentlemen come in, removing their straw hats upon entry. Crowds try to peak through the barred windows to eavesdrop, but they are shooed away. On Sundays, the wait to make a call can be an hour or more, especially after church gets out and entire families have hour-long conversations with loved ones,



telling the operator to cut them off at a certain time because they only can afford a certain number of minutes. Migrant families find fellowship in chatting with the dozens of people waiting to call loved ones on Sunday afternoon. Often, a particularly loud talker unknowingly airs her business in front of the waiting crowd. When she leaves, the gossip begins.

Here, a new social order is emerging, in which many of the markers of status that defined La Quebrada before the migration boom, such as land ownership and advanced age, are being replaced by the valued knowledge of the migrant economy, principally held by young returned migrants. The wisdom of experience is now held by young migrants who challenge the social order of the coffee economy. At the same time, new forms of social differentiation emerge within the migrant economy itself. Values such as education, lawful citizenship, and family responsibility have been redefined in the context of the migration phenomenon.

Until recently, ownership of coffee land, a store, and/or a high level of education were signs of high status in La Quebrada. Family connections to local politicians were also important. In the past decade, all of these factors have been either devalued or redefined by the decline of coffee and the rise of migration. The declining importance of education is the most surprising. Teachers complain that young people--especially young men--do not see the value of staying in school, since they plan on emigrating illegally when they are finished. Education level does not substantially impact one's ability to find work in the States, and college-educated people labor in the same jobs as non-literate peasants. Three of the town's most accomplished students, all with law degrees from the national university, recently emigrated illegally and live and work in

New Jersey alongside uneducated peers with no formal education. One of the town's largest coffee landholders washes dishes in an Atlanta restaurant. Predictably, the study of English has replaced agronomy as the most popular topic of study for the wealthy. There is no English taught in La Quebrada, so many parents, including the town's mayor, send their children to city schools in order to learn English.

In an economy that depends on wages earned in the United States, the ability to cross the border becomes the most valuable asset one can have. There are several ways to enter the US, each requiring some combination of money, knowledge, and connections. The simplest way, a legal visa, is the least common. No one from La Quebrada has obtained an immigrant visa in the past ten years. Obtaining a tourist visa is an option open only to the wealthy, who can demonstrate proof of assets to the U.S. Embassy in order to be granted permission to travel. An embassy interview costs \$100 and the would-be traveler must demonstrate significant wealth in order to convince the embassy that he or she will not overstay their visa. Nevertheless, several coffee growers and their children have obtained tourist visas and overstayed in order to work in the States. A tourist visa is, for all intents and purposes, treated like an immigrant visa by the general public in La Quebrada, and the ability to acquire a tourist visa is a sign of great wealth.

If a person cannot obtain a visa, the next option is to hire a smuggler to help cross the border. This also requires capital, and there are two ways to pay for the trip, which begins in Honduras, crosses into Guatemala, and then crosses into southern Mexico by boat. Once in Mexico, the migrants are smuggled through the country in trailers or buses, staying in designated safe houses along the way. According to a local *coyote*, the costs change depending on the "going rate" for bribing Mexican immigration

officials. The cost of transportation, lodging, and food is insignificant compared to the cost of bribes. And, of course, the *coyotes* keep some profit for themselves. One way that people pay for the trip by selling assets like coffee land, homes, or vehicles. This, however, is an unattractive option in a depressed economy, where people are forced to sell at low rates because they are desperate. I once saw a man, desperate for cash, try and sell fifty acres of coffee land for the equivalent of U.S. \$2000, less than a fifth of its market value. Another option is to use material assets as collateral for the smuggler, and then pay the smuggler in installments with wages earned in the US.

Either way, traveling with a *coyote* is only an option for people with some capital or assets. It is not available to the poorest segments of society, unless they have personal ties to the *coyote* and he or she trusts them enough to make the trip without putting any money down. This is common for the close kin of people who have previously traveled with the *coyote*. The relatives are like co-signers in the *coyote's* loan, and personal ties are necessary to obtain credit with the *coyote*, as long as the *coyote* knows that a relative is working in the States and can help make the payments.

The fact that coffee land is now being used as an asset to provide passage to the United States symbolizes the decline of coffee's importance, but also shows how past success is translated into capital in the migrant economy. Land, whether it is used for the production of coffee or to finance passage to the United States, is still used as capital to produce wealth. However, the coffee production employs a network of local people, including harvesters, millers, and merchants, while the use of land as collateral for migrant passage only enriches the *coyotes*, their lieutenants, and the Mexican and Guatemalan police and border patrol who receive their bribes to facilitate passage. The two main *coyotes* in town have not continued to grow coffee on their newly

acquired land. They have tended to convert it to pasture for cattle, when possible, or they have left it fallow, waiting for coffee prices to rise. However, the *coyote* has been so successful in his smuggling operation that he doesn't plan on investing the time or effort in coffee production.

### **Coffee Production and Social Structure**

The decline of coffee and the rise of migration has weakened the social bonds that people formed through participation in domestic economic production. It is important to recognize that coffee communities are marked by a volatile economy. Although the price regulations institutionalized by the International Coffee Agreement managed this volatility to a certain degree from 1962 until 1989, there were still constant rises and falls in world coffee prices that affected the fortunes of small farmers.

In his classic studies of San Jose, Puerto Rico, Eric Wolf (1956, 1967) saw coffee communities as being subject to great economic and social volatility, as opposed to the "closed corporate communities" that were well known in Latin American anthropology of that era. Unlike "closed" communities, "open" coffee communities do not have stable patron-client bonds, and have relatively weak systems of institutionalized reciprocity. Compared with peasant communities with strong leveling mechanisms and an ethic of institutionalized poverty, coffee communities tend to celebrate the accumulation of wealth as a marker of prestige and honor.

According to Wolf, ascendant growers in Puerto Rico tried to legitimate their position through conspicuous consumption, proving that they had "hit the jackpot" in the coffee casino. In a volatile economic climate with constantly shifting fortunes, public displays of wealth signified who was on top at a given moment. At the same time, the

declining classes tried to hold on to lost glory through the same means. Public displays of status translated economic success into social prestige. Wolf called attempts for ascendant elites to prove their new status "redefining behavior," as opposed to the "retaining" behavior of the old elites (Wolf 1967:519). Wolf saw such behavior as a rational adaptation to the volatile coffee economy. Reinvestment of profits in new homes or vehicles was safer than investing in productive capital, since the bottom could fall out of coffee prices at virtually any moment, while fixed assets like cars and homes retained value.<sup>49</sup> Although status plays were driven by particular cultural values, such as ideals of masculinity, Wolf recognized a certain form of economic rationality in the coffee farmers' seemingly irrational form of conspicuous consumption. In this case, "conspicuous consumption" was economically preferable to reinvestment of capital in coffee land. This behavior caused social problems, however. The desire for conspicuous consumption caused ascendant farmers to reduce the amount of wealth they distributed to kin in favor of personal "redefining behaviors"--displays of rising status--and this caused jealousy and envy throughout the community (Wolf 1967:521).

Given the inherent instability of coffee economies, and La Quebrada's particular history as a community founded by internal migrants who arrived to work in the lumber industry, it is clear that the social order is highly unstable, even when compared to other coffee communities. Because La Quebrada is a newly-formed community, differences in wealth or status do not have deep familial roots. Virtually all the inhabitants of La Quebrada arrived as lumber-cutters or coffee entrepreneurs, and this has fostered a strong tradition of socioeconomic mobility.

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<sup>49</sup> Wolf's study was conducted before the initiation of the International Coffee Agreement in 1962, which stabilized prices until 1989.

Prior to the rise of migration and the arrival of returnees, success and high status were associated with a person's ability to hire others to work, rather than work for hire. Those with even a small amount of capital hire *jornaleros* (male day laborers) to perform menial tasks in their *milpas* (maize and bean plots) and *fincas* (coffee farms). Household chores such as washing, cooking, and cleaning are commonly performed by hired women. This status hierarchy is directly tied to the division of labor in the coffee industry, with landowners hiring the landless as day-laborers. Although the strong patron-client bonds found in other peasant societies did not exist between particular landowning families and "their" workers, there was a necessary structural relation between landholders and the landless.

Locals see the present as a time of severe crisis and social disintegration precisely because migration has not filled the economic or social void left by coffee's demise. The concepts of status that were formed within the coffee system seem to have no meaning in the migrant economy. Landless people and small farmers relied on wage labor on larger farms to provide the means of subsistence and reproduction. The coffee crisis has created a situation where neither landholders or landless can survive off coffee production, and migration has created an unsustainable economic base that breaks social groups apart, threatens lives, and allows organized crime to thrive.

### **Negative Portrayals of Migrant Character**

As Mahler (1995) noted among Salvadorans in Long Island, people in La Quebrada tend to explain systemic economic conditions as the results of individual behavior. Accusations of jealousy, envy, greed, and laziness are common idioms that people use

to explain the economic crisis in which they find themselves. They blame the crisis on individual character flaws more often than structural forces--such as the decline in coffee prices, restrictive immigration policy, or a corrupt government. These local narratives highlight the failings of individuals as the source of crisis.

The moral criticism of migrants as egotistical, selfish, or greedy parallels the ways that Salvadoran migrants in the U.S. criticize each other, according to Mahler (1995). She argues that Salvadoran peasants who have migrated to the U.S. face intense pressure to produce a surplus to send home, which creates an individualistic, dog-eat-dog culture that clashes with the more egalitarian values of pre-war Salvadoran rural society. Because the migrants are marginalized from the U.S. mainstream, they exploit one another to extract a surplus. She focuses on the existence of peasant networks of mutual assistance and social reciprocity in rural El Salvador that can no longer be sustained in the United States, where migrants attempt to profit off one another rather than assist each other (216).

This interpretation of migrant competition downplays the social divisions inherent in "open" peasant communities, especially coffee towns. People in La Quebrada indeed exert great amounts of pressure on migrants to send money home. They depend on migrant earnings. Yet the demands are quite different for different classes of people, and do not reflect an expectation of generalized reciprocity, but rather an expectation that the structure of the coffee-era class hierarchy be maintained.

Here, I will focus on two common narratives that reveal a great deal about the way that local class structure determines the social pressures placed upon migrants. The first describes the belief that certain migrants are "greedy" and the second that they are

"lazy." These narratives are surprising, because both are strong critiques, showing that certain migrants' economic success has not translated into social prestige. Although most migrants are hard-working and self-sacrificing, they are often accused of laziness and greed by people close to them, even members of their own families. Their behavior is judged according to cultural standards that cannot adequately explain the new economic realities in which the community finds itself. Surprisingly, the economic importance of migrants has not led the contestation of existing standards of value, but a process by which existing values are reasserted in the face of dramatic change. For various reasons, returned migrants have not challenged the belief that they are lazy and/or greedy.

In ethnographic interviews and casual conversations, people from all social classes in La Quebrada criticize migrants from landholding families by using the word *ambición*. Locals commonly distinguish between *migrantes de necesidad* and *migrantes de ambición*, which I translate as "migrants of need" and "migrants of greed." *Ambición* is a term of opprobrium, and is thought to be a sin by both the Protestant and Catholic churches in La Quebrada. The word suggests "greed for power and wealth" as opposed to American English, where it means something more like "earnest desire for success." Although *ambición* can have neutral or positive connotations in Spanish, In this case, *ambición* is the excessive--and socially disruptive--desire for honor or wealth, and is therefore more akin to the English "greed" than it is to "ambition." Although this was not a consensus opinion, it was one of the most common descriptions of migrants that I heard over the course of my research.

The capacity to differentiate between the necessary and the superfluous, i.e. to distinguish need from greed, is an example of how moral concepts can serve to



legitimate class differences. One class' necessity is another's luxury. All societies draw the line between legitimate desire and greed, and such judgments reflect opinions about socially legitimate action. In English, the word "ambition" is used to describe a positive assessment of individual desire, while greed is a negative assessment of the same drive when it crosses the bounds of acceptability. As Bourdieu (1977:77-78) argues, the classification of certain forms of desire as virtue and others as vice (such as need vs. greed) is an example of how social hierarchies delimit the conscious possibilities of action for certain groups. He writes:

...the dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions...engender aspirations and practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements, the most improbable practices are excluded...which inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is already refused and love the inevitable. (77)

The French working class has the tendency to "turn necessity into virtue," believing that certain practices--characteristic of the upper classes--are "not for the likes of them" (379-380) Bourdieu sees this as a form of ideological boundary-maintenance. He refers to moral criticisms of "inappropriate" behavior as "calls to [class] order," emphasizing the fact that they legitimate existing class boundaries. He writes:

The calls to order ('Who does she think she is?' 'That's not for the likes of us') which reaffirm the principle of conformity--the only explicit norm of popular taste--and aim to encourage the 'reasonable' choices that are...imposed by the objective conditions also contain a warning against the ambition to distinguish oneself by identifying with other groups, that is, they are a reminder of class solidarity (1984:381).

One could easily dispute Bourdieu's assertion that conformity is "*the only* explicit norm of popular taste" (my emphasis), but the key point here is that attempts to

transcend the boundaries of class are often considered "unreasonable" or "in bad taste." In ethnographic interviews, virtually everybody I spoke with claimed that they wished to migrate out of pure necessity, whether it be the need to feed one's family or the need to purchase a new truck or build a new home. However, local gossip suggested that there were certain types of people for whom migration was considered to be a morally acceptable action, and others for whom it was not, and that these moral judgments were based on social estimations of "necessity." In La Quebrada, the standard of "necessity" approached the minimal limits of human survival. The only migrants who were consistently characterized as "needy" were those who owned no land and faced truly dire economic circumstances, and did not have enough income to house, clothe, or feed their families.

"Migrants of need" are generally the landless poor; migrants of greed own coffee land or some other valued asset. Migrants of need make the trip to the U.S. on their own; migrants of greed pay a *coyote*. The following quote from a landless person, criticizing a coffee farmer for migrating, is representative of the idea that certain migrants are greedy:

*Si yo tuviera tanto dinero, por que me tiraría para los Estados? Puedo hacer la vida aquí...poner un negocio...no hay necesidad de dejar la familia. Los que van con coyote tienen sus cosas. ¿Por que se van? Y los que van con visa, ni quiera Dios. [If I had that much money, why would I head out for the States? I could make my life here...start a business...there's no need to leave your family. People that go with a coyote have their things. Why do they go? And those that go with a visa, God forbid...]*

The idea expressed here is that people who can afford a *coyote* have enough capital to lead a decent life in La Quebrada, and therefore do not migrate out of need. The

significant point is that those who can afford to pay a *coyote* to smuggle them across the border are considered to be free from "necessity" and act out of greed.

Another major marker of "need" vs. "greed" is ownership of a home. Many migrants say they desire to *hacer mi casa* and *comprar mi carro* when asked why they want to migrate. Young married men wish to move into their own homes when married, rather than live with parents. I once heard a group of young men making fun of a particularly-flashy returned migrant, who owned a new pickup, a shiny revolver, and numerous gold medallions, but rented--rather than owned--a shabby, pine-board shack. They said, partly in jest,

¿Es que él es tonto? La casa y *después* el carro." [Is he stupid? It's the house first and then the car.]

This returnee was criticized for spending his money the wrong way. Because the cost of a *coyote* is enough to construct a modest cinder block house, those who spend money on *coyotes* are seen as desiring more than the "necessary" and are accused of "greed."

The term *conformista* (conformist) is sometimes used as a term of honor, indicating humility and a sense that one is happy with one's position in life. It is the opposite of ambition, and means that one only desires that which is socially appropriate to people of his or her class. Consider the following exchange between me and a landless *jornalero* who was considering illegal immigration:

*Cree usted que se va por necesidad?*

[Would you say that you are migrating out of economic necessity?]

*Mire. Soy conformista. No soy ambicioso. No ocupo muchas cosas...pero ahorita el trabajo no da ni para la comida. Algunos se van para comprar su carro...para hacer su casa. Yo no. Soy conformista de verdad.*

[Look, I'm a conformist. I'm not ambitious. I don't need many things, but right now my work doesn't even provide enough for food. Some people go [to the US] to get a car or a house. Not me. I'm a real conformist.]

This respondent is defending himself against charges of selfishness by saying proudly that he is a conformist, in opposition to an "ambitious" person, who would presumably migrate to gain material wealth while shirking his responsibility to his family. He, on the other hand, is truly desperate, and is looking for money to provide food for his family. Conforming to social expectations is respected because it displays an acceptance of a given order. This respondent defends himself by saying, in effect, "I know my place. I'm not greedy. I just want to provide for my family." As Bourdieu argued, the landless people turned necessity into virtue, celebrating a "conformity" that was near the minimal limits of human survival.

The social characteristics that distinguish these two categories express a particular concept of virtuous conduct, in which the ceiling of legitimate aspiration almost exactly parallels the lifestyle of La Quebrada's prosperous coffee growers.

Surprisingly, coffee-owning parents often accused their own children of greed, because they felt that they sought a lifestyle that was materially "better" (or at least different) than that of their parents. However, the economic realities of the coffee crisis made it impossible to *maintain* this standard of living, let alone surpass it.

Upward mobility in itself was not criticized. Poor migrants were not deemed "too big for their britches" or derided for challenging an existing class order. In fact, returnees who purchased coffee land or opened typical stores were celebrated as success stories. However, migrants who owned land were criticized for desiring more than what been

considered "prosperous" by a previous generation. People are defending the *structure* of the coffee society and not the particular people within that structure. Upward mobility itself was celebrated as long as the definition of "success"--the terms that defined social value--remained intact.

### *The Idle Immigrant*

Another common anti-migrant narrative accused them of being lazy or idle. People commonly referred to male emigrants as *haragán* (pl. *haraganes*), a Spanish word meaning "idle person," "loafer," or, more specific to this case, "a man who feels he is above work."<sup>50</sup> The etymology of the word *haragán* is disputed, but it has been in use in the hispanophone world since at least the eighteenth century, when it was used in Spain to describe peasant workers who preferred to relax in the shade, sing, or sleep while the hacienda owner was not present, according to the Real Academia Española's definition from 1758.<sup>51</sup> Despite being worlds away from imperial Spain both temporally and geographically, the word's meaning in La Quebrada was quite similar to the Spanish definition. An *haragán* is a man with a sub-par work ethic who shirks his social responsibility in favor of self-indulgent leisure. Both in interviews and in neighborly conversation, people would criticize migrants as *haraganes*. This definition surprised me, because I tended to think of undocumented workers in the

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<sup>50</sup> Zillberg (qtd. in Andrade-Eekhoff and Silva-Avalos 2003) finds that this term is also used to describe young people who receive migrant remittances in El Salvador.

<sup>51</sup> The complete definition reads, in Spanish: El holgazán, floxo, perezoso y tardo en lo que mandan hacer. El P. Guadix citado por Covarr. dice que es voz Árábica, y que vale tanto como él que canta quando hace calor: lo que ordinariamente executan los gañanes y peones, en que no estando el dueño de la hacienda presente, se echan a la sombra, y se están cantando u durmiendo sin trabajar. Lat. Defes, dis, Iners, tis. SANTIAG. Quar. Serm. 2. Salutac. El delinquente, el fullero, el blasfemo, y aun el hijo de vecino haragán, aprendiz destas virtúdes. Herr. Hist. Ind. Decad. 4 lib. 9. cap. 7. Ni quieren hacer heredades ni sembrar, porque son grandes haraganes.

U.S. as hardworking and self-sacrificing people who performed difficult labor to support their families back home. The fact that the view that migrants are lazy was largely uncontested by returned migrants was even more surprising. Returnees seemed to reinforce, rather than challenge, this misperception. I expected concepts of wealth and status to change in accordance with the new social realities of migration, but such concepts die hard, and the presence of returnees had done little to challenge the idea that migrants were selfish.

Moncho, profiled in the previous chapter, is perhaps the most extreme *haragán* in La Quebrada, yet he symbolizes the current generation of young males for many people. Though this perception is not universal, I heard people of all classes--including relatives of migrants and returnees--depict migrants as *haraganes*. This belief existed for several reasons. First, the recent crop of migrants inherited coffee land from their parents and have abandoned it for the US. Their decision is seen as a desire "not to work" because they are not working in coffee farming. In addition, there is a severe lack of information about the hardships of life in the US, which allows the paradisiacal impression to survive. Telephone service is new, and impressions of the U.S. are strongly influenced by U.S. satellite cable television programming, which has been available in La Quebrada since electricity arrived in 2000. Returned migrants rarely admit to struggling in the US. When they do, they are dismissed or simply ignored (Mahler 1995:85-86). People believe they are "making excuses" for not having returned with more money or for having sent too little money home while they were away. The successful returnees make those still in the States seem lazy, and people wonder why so-and-so was able to return with money while another person was not.

One would expect the growing number of returnees to challenge such depictions of migrants. There are signs that this may occur in the future, but, on the whole, migrants have done little to challenge these criticisms by presenting their own view of the world. As Mahler (1995) notes, returnees and migrants do not counter the utopian perception of life in the U.S. held by their countrymen. In many cases, they reaffirm this view, and when they do speak of hardship, people refuse to believe them (1995:85-88).

Returnees' tendency to maintain the utopian image of the U.S. creates an unrealistic impression of migrant life. The presence of "successful" migrant makes some families feel that they are receiving too little money from kin in the U.S. and that perhaps their relatives are wasting money on "vices" in the States. This is especially true among the wives of married men in the States, who resent being left alone and are often suspicious of their husbands. They believe that they should be receiving far more than they actually do, largely because of the myth of easy money in the US. It is common for people to suspect that migrant relatives are secretly hoarding some of their income or spending it frivolously, especially on alcohol or extramarital affairs. If the migrants are earning so much in the US, why are people in La Quebrada not receiving more? The behavior of returnees ends up placing more pressure on migrants by creating unrealistic expectations. This impression is so deeply rooted that people refuse to accept evidence to the contrary, which perpetuates the migratory cycle.

Consider the following joke that I heard countless times while in the field:

*¿Oíste del muchacho de La Quebrada que fue pa'los Estados? Pues, en su primer día allá, unos pocos minutos después de haber llegado, encuentra un billete de diez dólares votado en el suelo. Está allí con un amigo que dice, "¿Compa, lo vas a sacar?" Él sonríe y dice "Pues déjalo. Hoy no tengo ganas de trabajar."*

[Did you hear about the guy from La Quebrada who went to the States? Well, on his first day there, a couple of minutes after arriving, he sees a ten-dollar bill on the ground. He's there with a friend who says, "Hey man, are you going to pick that up?" The guy smiles and says, "No, leave it there. I don't feel like working today."]

This joke is significant for two reasons. First, it suggests that people do not have to work hard to satisfy their needs in the US. Money is everywhere. At the same time, the migrants will not work in order to obtain the money. When I asked a woman in her sixties to explain why the joke was so funny, she pointed to the fact that the migrants do not want to work.

*Es que ellos no quieren trabajar. Ni para sacar diez dólares... Son unos haraganes.*

[It's that they don't want to work. Not even to get ten dollars...They are some real loafers.]

This woman's son works as a salad chef in a motel near Mt. Rushmore in South Dakota. Her late-husband was one of La Quebrada's largest landholders. She called her own son, who sent money home at regular intervals, an *haragán*, largely because her once-prosperous family had fallen on hard times and she placed the blame on him. The joke seemed to reflect her experience with migrant dependency, and she found it quite funny.

The joke emphasizes the laziness of the migrant pair, as if to say, "Even in a place where there's money everywhere, they still won't even bend to pick it up." Taking the joke into account, it is possible to see why Moncho is the epitome of the migrant *haragán*. He was given every opportunity to succeed, and now must migrate to find work. He is even unsuccessful at migration, having been deported or detained during all of his attempts. The relative ease of Moncho's upbringing, and his inability to take



advantage of it, is analogous to the dollars on the ground that the migrants choose not to pick up. The key is that neither Moncho nor the other migrants have--in the public's opinion--taken full advantage of what their parents have provided.

Moncho and his peers are members of the first generation to have been raised entirely in La Quebrada. Their parents were migrants from other parts of Honduras that had some success in coffee-growing. Although Moncho has not been able to migrate successfully, many of his peers, the sons of the coffee elite, have done so. These people face the pressure of rising expectations of success while living in a declining economy. Their parents were able to make a living as coffee farmers after the departure of the lumber industry. However, the coffee crisis has made it almost impossible for young people to achieve the prosperity of their parents, making emigration a popular alternative. The general economic decline that La Quebrada has experienced in the past decade is often blamed on their perceived lack of work-ethic. People perceive the economic crisis to be the result of the younger generation's laziness. The *haraganes* bear the responsibility for the hard times in which they live, and are accused not only of abandoning the coffee industry, but also of not being able to earn enough in the US. Whereas Moncho's parents' generation worked from the bottom up, the current generation is seen as lazy, unwilling to do the work that their parents did to achieve their relatively high status. They bear the responsibility for the general economic decline in La Quebrada, and their decision to migrate is seen as an abandonment of their social obligation. The fact that Moncho has even failed at migration turns tragedy into farce.

The narrative is an expression of generational decline that places the blame for a structural problem (the coffee crisis), on the shoulders of individual young people.

The hard times in La Quebrada are seen as the outcome of decisions made by individual actors, and migration is perceived as an escape from the burden of local expectations and responsibility--a cop out by the spoiled youth who then waste their opportunity to earn money in the United States. This inter-generational element of remittance economies is crucial, and it explains why migrants are so often seen in a negative light, especially when parents depend on their wages for survival.

### **Gossip, Confusion, and Control**

It will likely come as no surprise that some migrants from La Quebrada were accused of being "greedy." In anthropological studies of rural Latin America, time-worn concepts such as the "limited-good" (Foster 1965) and other versions of the "moral economy" emphasize group-solidarity, generalized reciprocity, and social reproduction over individual initiative. Prominent development scholars have seen these group-oriented values as maladaptive obstacles to economic development, contrasting Latin American "groupism" with a reified Protestant Ethic of individual ambition (e.g. McClelland 1985; Harrison 1985). These "cultural theories of enterprise" are intellectually dubious (Billig 1994), and the myth of the relative absence of enterprise in rural Latin American has been strongly challenged by Hernando De Soto (1989, 2000) and others who focus on historical and institutional factors that inhibit entrepreneurialism, rather than attributing underdevelopment to essentialized cultural traits.

On the surface, the criticism of migrants as "greedy" could appear to be an example of "groupism" in rural Latin America. Such characterizations could be seen as the result of a collectively-held opposition to individual advancement at the expense of the group. However, this is not the case. In La Quebrada, individual upward mobility is

greatly valued, but only up to a certain point where it becomes "greed." All societies contain normative concepts of right and wrong that limit extreme individualism. Indeed, they could not be considered "societies" if they did not. The difference between these two categories reveals basic principles of individuality and sociality in La Quebrada. The determination of this boundary is not a reflection of a distinctive group-orientation. These concepts are not timeless ethical principles--they are contested within the political and religious spheres. In La Quebrada, the standards of "need vs. greed" are the product of the class structure of the coffee economy, and the rise of a migrant has challenged these concepts, albeit to a surprisingly limited degree.

Individual ambition is only seen as a negative when it threatens the survival (reproduction) of local social structure. La Quebrada is based on a structural relationship between landowners and landless workers; when people who own large amounts of land and a home decide to migrate, their personal ambitions are deemed "greedy" because they are destroying the economic base of the community without developing new alternatives. People value economic upward mobility, as long as individual economic success provides some form of employment for others, maintaining the viability of the local economy.

In this case, the markers of "greed" tend to reflect a pursuit of individual gain at the expense of processes of social reproduction. This does not mean that any ambition beyond the minimal needs of reproduction are seen as anti-social. Migration is only seen as negative when it threatens the community's economic base, which is based on exploitation and production for profit. Coffee production is seen as far less exploitative and dangerous than the migrant economy, because it at least allows families to remain together, with adults caring for children and the elderly. Migrants are greedy because they must leave their families in search of a decent wage, eroding

social relationships in search of the economic means of survival. The drive for self-advancement only becomes "greed" when it threatens social reproduction.

This does not explain why the contemporary crisis is so often framed as the product of individual character flaws. I believe that the local criticism of migrants arises from a profound sense of confusion about how and if La Quebrada can continue to survive as a community if it depends on a remittance economy. A great deal of the meaning of local gossip lies in the act of telling it. People explain the crisis in whatever terms they have available, and the ability to formulate an explanation of how and why migrants are able to prosper or fail--however humorous, simplistic, or mean-spirited--provides the speaker with a sense of control and comprehension. Gossip, especially critical gossip about migrants' failings, allows people to reassert principles of sociality at a time where the world seems to be turned upside down. Some migrants, like Santos Orellana, leave town with nothing, and magically return to live the lifestyle of the coffee elite, while the children of the coffee elite struggle to survive. The journey to the U.S. is often a magically transformative event that a great number of people--especially the older generation--cannot comprehend. The act of giving one's opinion--no matter what that opinion may be--demonstrates some ability to explain the world.

The popular view of migration is ambivalent, and the negative gossip about migrants always is accompanied by a tacit acknowledgment of their economic importance.

Locals know that many families depend on remittances, and that some individuals have achieved economic success. At the same time, they recognize the dramatic negative consequences for the future viability of their community. They tend to express this negative sentiment in incoherent ways, targeting individual migrants while knowing that they rely on them economically. They do not know a way out of this cycle.

The popular ambivalence over migration that I have described here has not been reflected in mainstream political or intellectual debates. Migrant remittances now generate more domestic income than any other sector of the Honduran economy, including agriculture and the *maquila*, so the government sees migration as an economic resource. Unfortunately, politicians and intellectuals tend to downplay the fact that communities that depend on migrant remittances face an unsustainable future. Families are broken apart and education is devalued. Organized criminal networks led by *coyotes* and drug smugglers attain tremendous social and political clout. Migrants die in the desert. Women disproportionately bare the responsibility for raising children and caring for the aged.

Throughout Latin America, development leaders have argued that migrant money can be put to positive use. The only way to end the need to migrate is to create economic opportunity at home, and, they argue that migrant dollars can be used to this end. By embracing migration as "development," governments are trying to be pragmatic and resourceful, but what message are they sending? From the perspective of a would-be migrant, why rely on the largesse of your countrymen in the States when you can join them? Why depend on the "trickle down" from migrant remittances when you can go to the source? Is the government giving up on domestic reform? The desirability of migration demonstrates a lack of domestic economic opportunity, and therefore demonstrates the failure of previous development paradigms to create that opportunity. By embracing migration, politicians are clearly looking for a way to end the cycle of migration by creating something at home, but they are tacitly acknowledging migration's effectiveness. The "big questions" of global inequality have faded to the background, in favor of a resigned acceptance of migration as a fact of life in a globalized world. It seems fruitless to ask why these countries must depend on

remittances in the first place or to investigate the structural factors that make the worst job in the U.S. is better than the best job in the Honduran countryside. In this political climate, the migrant development platform takes the resigned position that countries like Honduras must "make due with what they have," viewing migrant remittances as an economic resource.

In the chapter that follows, I trace the history of Honduran social policy in order to understand how it has arrived at this point. The history of Honduran social movements is an illustrative example of what Andre Gunder Frank has called "the shift from development to crisis management." Since the initiation of structural adjustment in 1990, the basic issues of social equity that guided development policy since the fifties have been replaced by a narrow focus on short term income-generation and absolute growth, with hardly any attention paid to the distribution of resources or the long-term social costs of economic activity. The contemporary view of migrant remittances as "development" is the end result of a long and painful process of depoliticization.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Ashes Of Progress: The Cold War And Its Aftermath In Honduras**

The 1980s are often called Latin America's "lost decade," and they were especially painful in Honduras, which became the "main girder in the bridge" (LaFeber 1983) for a U.S. foreign policy obsessed with stopping the spread of the Soviet sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. Surrounded by countries mired in brutal civil wars, Honduras became the base of operations for many important parts of the Cold War hemispheric struggle, most famously, the training of the Nicaraguan Contras.

By decade's end, the Cold War was waning, and new forms of politics had emerged, not only in Honduras, but throughout Central America. These "new" social movements, (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Escobar and Alvarez 1992) rose from the ashes of defeated guerilla armies, and set their political sights on the cultural rights of particular ethnic groups and environmental preservation, rather than the more systemic issues of economic inequality or dependency that informed politics in previous decades.

After the return to democracy in 1990, non-governmental organizations took on important roles as protectors of social welfare, while national agrarian boards, peasant organizations, and labor unions lost political clout. The political system became decentralized, and individual municipalities were given greater legal autonomy. As the immediate horror of the violence subsided, social reformers turned to more pragmatic forms of politics that yielded many important benefits. However, new social movements pushed basic questions of social equality to the background, as the

language of rights replaced the language of equality (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), at a time in history when the gap between the world's rich and poor increased at historically unprecedented rates. These movements shifted the grounds of social policy away from state-level institutions and turned international non-governmental organizations into the most visible protectors of social welfare in Honduras.<sup>52</sup>

As non-governmental institutions became increasingly important politically, the Honduran economy became more and more dependent on migrant remittances. Between 1990 and the present, migrant remittances went from an insignificant part of the Honduran economy to the single biggest source of foreign exchange. The rise of migration to the United States in the past two decades serves as a clear symbol of the inability of Cold War development policies to bring about meaningful hemispheric reform and regional economic stability. After decades of agrarian reform, state-led development programs, and international development schemes, remitted wages from people working in the U.S. have become the most important source of income for many rural communities.

Remittances have diffused some of the political economic tensions that were left unresolved after the "lost decade." Without migrant dollars, there would likely be greater competition for low-paying jobs, increased rural to urban migration, general economic unrest, political calls for economic reform throughout the region, and a rise in *guerilla* movements. Because the short-term economic benefits of migration--such

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<sup>52</sup> Hugo Noé Pino, former director of the Central Bank of Honduras and ambassador to the United States writes: "A principios de los años setenta la transformación agraria llegó a considerarse como el 'quehacer fundamental' del gobierno. Hoy, a lo sumo, se habla de una 'modernización' que, para muchos analistas, no es más que la muerte de la reforma agraria" (1995:9). [At the beginning of the seventies, the agrarian transformation came to be considered the fundamental project of the government. Today, in sum, people talk of a "modernization" that, for many analysts, is nothing more than the death of the agrarian reform.]



as increased incomes and stimulated domestic consumption--have diffused domestic political conflict, migration is often described as a political "escape valve" by Central American intellectuals. Some politicians, notably Mexico's President Vicente Fox, have publicly celebrated migrants as "heroes."

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how historical events have shaped political life in contemporary Honduras and to illustrate the relationship between the rise of migration and the decline of rural politics. The belief that migration is a solution to rural problems--held not only by migrants but also by politicians and intellectuals--is one consequence of the depoliticized climate that has existed since the eighties, when the military leadership effectively destroyed both radical and reformist politics in the country. To see undocumented migration as an economic resource is a uniquely postmodern understanding of progress, in that it values the inflow of foreign exchange provided by migrants while disregarding the damaging long-term social consequences of migrant dependency.

The contemporary vision of migration as "development" must be placed in historical context. Since the end of the World War II, the Honduran government has tried to improve the condition of rural society through various sorts of modernization programs. The fact that migrant remittances are perceived as an acceptable substitute to social or economic policy measures demonstrates the rejection of modern ideas of progress based on a class compromise and redistribution of wealth, and the valorization of any practice that provides income in the short term.

To tell the story of this political transformation, I will focus on the life of Prudencio Flores--one of La Quebrada's most influential and controversial political leaders. His

story is, in one sense, uniquely Honduran, but it also reflects more systematic trends in the history of Latin American progressive thought. Prudencio's political life began with an interest in progressive democracy in the fifties, then turned to radicalism in the seventies, and eventually came to embrace participatory democracy, "local" empowerment, and sustainable entrepreneurialism by the early nineties. His life serves as a model of the general ideological trends that Honduran rural activists have followed since the fifties.

Prudencio is the first person that I met in La Quebrada. He was active in all manners of community politics, and was one of the leaders of a participatory rural development project that was being carried out by USDA and Cornell University in 2000 and 2001. He owned about fifty acres of coffee land, and was helping to establish an organic coffee cooperative, supported by the USAID/USDA project, that was preparing for its first harvest when I first arrived in the field for exploratory research. In fact, the first time I met Prudencio, he was covered in a foul coating of organic fertilizer made from rotting coffee husks and chicken manure. Because I was introduced as a Cornell student by a member of the project, Prudencio was outwardly cooperative and kind from our first meeting, showing me and my wife around the co-op and patiently answering our questions. Our initial relationship was relatively formal, but when I returned to La Quebrada for an extended stay after the initial research, I spoke with Prudencio several times per week, worked on his coffee farm, and frequently went to him with questions about local politics and history.

Prudencio lives in a large, nondescript, concrete home on the top of a hill a few miles from town. He also owns an adjacent *pulperia* which turns his home into a

neighborhood community center, where passersby sit on outdoor benches to wait out rainstorms, buy cold drinks or household staples, or just sit and chat. He has a lush garden where he experiments with different crops and organic techniques. In addition to staple crops like corn, beans, and squash, I noticed a patch of raspberry bushes, a plant I had never before seen in Honduras and have not seen since, as well as carrots, radishes, cabbage, and other vegetables which are uncommon in the area and demonstrate his curiosity and desire for innovation.

Inside his home, one immediately notices a bookshelf in the center of the living room, which stands out against the drab cinder-block walls and bare concrete floor. The bookshelf contains titles on psychology, the history of philosophy, Marxism (Lenin's *What is to be Done?*), pedagogy, and organic farming techniques. The walls of the home are bare. Religious icons, family photographs, and framed school diplomas--common in even the most sparse Honduran homes--are notably absent. Besides the book shelf, the living room contains a floral print living room set, and not much more, except for a shelf that holds bottles of natural medicines purchased from a vendor in the city. An open kitchen, with a typical wood-burning stove and new electric refrigerator, abuts the living room. A hired cook offers visitors a glass of fresh tamarind juice, a homemade pastry, or perhaps a cup of coffee.

A self-described "activista, revolucionario, y cafetalero." Prudencio is a socially-minded, highly-educated farmer, who is as comfortable talking about Marx's critique of the Hegelian dialectic as he is discussing coffee varietals. His sons, both born in the seventies, are named Lenin and Karl. He is an idealistic, sometimes intimidating man, whose tendency to turn any conversation into a political debate has earned him a reputation for demagoguery and political grandstanding. Trained as a teacher, he is

wont to spontaneously lecture on political theory--especially Marx--and his outspoken atheism has made him an extremely controversial figure in the community.

Despite his small stature, he always seems ready to burst from his own skin in argument. His eyes focus intensely, and his veins bulge from his forearms, which ripple with muscle from years of work on his coffee farm. He sports a pointy Lenin-esque beard that gives his face a diabolical cast. There are no casual conversations with him. Everything is an intellectual battle, and he seems to get great pleasure from putting his opponents off-guard with bluntness or hyperbole intended to shock (e.g referring to prominent politicians as "corrupt, Mafioso, assassin, son-of-a-bitch, criminals," referring to anthropologists as *antropófagos* (man-eaters), or arguing to me, with an impish grin, that President Bush intentionally destroyed the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001). Once accustomed to his style of argumentation, one realizes that such pronouncements are made in the spirit of intellectual combativeness rather than reasoned belief. Prudencio's rhetorical style is designed to provoke, and he only moderates his views after much debate. What he lacks in nuance, he usually makes up for with passion.

One day, after several months in the field, I asked Prudencio what his dream for La Quebrada's future would be. He answered with uncustomary restraint and seriousness, showing none of his typical bombast:

*I would like to create a center for sustainable living...a community-owned building with land and fields to produce all types of food...tilapia ponds, organic orchards, all types of fruits and vegetables, and of course organic coffee for export. We could even have a small hotel for tourists. We would have a recreation center where the youth could play sports, a soccer field, table tennis. I would like to have acupuncture, herbal medicines, and other types of alternative health programs.*

Prudencio envisions a sustainable land of plenty that is self-sufficient, equitable, environmentally friendly, and fun. His vision closely parallels the model of eco-development that has become popular throughout Central America in the last two decades, as the "red" politics of class have largely been replaced by the "green" politics of sustainability and participatory development since the 1980s (cf. Babb 2004). Since the end of the Cold War, Costa Rica, with its strong democratic tradition and eco-centered development approach, has become the model of success in the region for progressives. Eco-tourism, non-traditional export agriculture, and community-development are all combined in Prudencio's vision.

The story of how Prudencio--a self-described radical--came to embrace this relatively moderate political agenda speaks to the general intellectual history of Central America since the Cold War. Prudencio's changing political philosophy illustrates the differences between modernity and postmodernity, understood as ideal types. His youthful belief in large-scale sociopolitical theories of progress--first social democracy, then Marxism--transformed into a belief in strong local democracy and eco-projects like orchards and tilapia ponds. This transformation was not entirely voluntary. In fact, it was a painful and frustrating process that ended in Prudencio's disgusted resignation from politics in 2004.

Prudencio came of age at a pivotal moment in the history of Honduran politics. During the forties, fifties, and sixties, the Honduran government began to play an important role in the promotion of public welfare in rural areas, and the state became increasingly representative of a national community rather than a small cadre of elites. Swept up by the tides of post-World War II modernization, the Honduran government

attempted to improve social conditions through public education, public health, labor policy, and agrarian reform. Taken together, these policies instilled a new *modern* political philosophy that was initially promulgated by elites but became a part of mainstream culture by the sixties.

This philosophy was based on a diachronic notion of progress, founded on the possibility of a compromise between labor and capital and a close link between state and nation. This new conception of the role and responsibility of government led to rising expectations of socioeconomic progress, following the democratic model of capitalist modernization. Unfortunately, the growth of democracy and the inchoate class compromise would be stunted by the political realities of the Cold War in the sixties.

Prudencio was born in 1949 in a provincial coffee town about thirty kilometers from La Quebrada. His hometown was a conservative community devoted to coffee production (for landholders) and subsistence agriculture (for smallholders and landless people). At that time, the town was dominated by the Catholic church, and his mother was, in his words, "a Catholic fanatic" who constantly prayed to the saints and forced him to say the rosary several times daily. He spent a great amount of time with his paternal grandfather, who, in his words was a "cacique" who owned cattle land outside of town and was a local political leader.<sup>53</sup> According to Prudencio, his grandfather had eighty-five children with ten different women. He speaks of his grandfather with great nostalgia, as a relic of a bygone pre-modern era where people gained wealth and status by sponsoring rituals and redistributing wealth:

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<sup>53</sup> See Paul Friedrich (1965) for a description of Mexican *cacicazgo* during this time period. "An Agrarian 'Fighter'" in *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology*, Melford Spiro, ed. Free Press, New York.

My grandfather was *todo un señor...un hombre de verdad*. He had eighty --five children with ten women...Can you imagine? And here was a man who lived with honor. He was rich and had land, but he never had to worry because people respected him. He buried all his money in the ground. He never went to a bank....No one would even think about robbing him. When someone in the family, or maybe a *campesino*, had a wedding, the entire village was invited and everyone could eat the cake...which, back then, was really just bread. And he would sponsor Catholic masses in [the closest parish]...Everyone respected this man. He was a man of the people."

At that time, Honduras was ruled by military dictator Juan Manuel Galv  z, a member of the Nationalist party, which had long been the ally of the Catholic Church. For most the twentieth century, the Honduran army brutally repressed labor movements among urban artisans and workers on the banana plantations. This began to change in the late-forties. In 1949, Galvez signed an OAS charter guaranteeing the rights of labor organizations (Euraque 1996a:92). Five years later, the country was shaken by the largest strike in Central American history, when 35,000 banana plantation workers allied with factory workers in what has been called the Honduran "Paris Commune." This strike led to a wave of labor reforms, assisted by the CIA and U.S. labor-relations specialists, and the country's first national elections in several decades in 1957, which were also the first elections with universal suffrage. Dr. Ramon Villeda Morales, a progressive Liberal, was elected in 1957 and preceded to institute a wave of state-reforms with the backing of the United States, first through the Good Neighbor Program under Eisenhower and then through the Alliance for Progress under Kennedy.

Prudencio was directly affected by the election of President Villeda Morales. His early education was in a parochial school; Honduras had no truly national public school system until the fifties, and it expanded greatly under the modernization programs led by Villeda Morales.<sup>54</sup> Prudencio switched to a public school at age eleven. His move to a public school coincided with the questioning of his mother's faith. In his words:

At the age of twelve, I began to doubt the Catholic religion, and I was fighting with my mother. I began to hear about Castro, Che, and the Cuban Revolution on the radio broadcasts and I expressed my support for the revolutionaries. This outraged my mother, since she thought I was disavowing the Catholic church...She kicked me out of the house when I was sixteen.

Prudencio took the Christian value of iconoclasm too much to heart for the taste of his mother and his religious teachers. He acknowledges that his political development was closely linked to adolescent rebellion. At that time, progressive politics were completely absent from the Honduran Catholic church, which had not yet been reformed by the Second Vatican Council and the rise of liberation theology, which would significantly change the church in later years (White 1977). The church symbolized a staid traditionalism for a young idealist like Prudencio. He remembers being a favorite of the local clergy, who recognized his intelligence at a young age, and knowing that he came from a pious family, tried to steer him towards a religious life with frequent praise and gifts of sports equipment. He rejected the church, and this led to conflict with his mother. To this day, he associates religion with his mother, bringing her up in almost every conversation on the matter.

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<sup>54</sup> There were some public schools, funded by municipalities, as early as the nineteenth century, but it wasn't until the postwar modernization of Galvez and Villeda Morales that the national education system reached most rural areas.



Prudencio names Jesus Christ as one of his heroes, but he despises the Catholic church. Like many secular intellectuals, he understands the story of Christ as one of courageous iconoclasm in the face of oppression. He is familiar with Hegelian and Marxist theories of religion, and believes that organized religion perpetuates the status quo through an ideology of obedience that contradicts the fundamentally revolutionary message of Jesus Christ. He says:

I saw the Church as teaching people obedience, not liberation. I was a dynamic person, who felt that power needed to be in the hands of the people, and not the nuns and priests. Jesus himself rebelled against the power of the priests, who were corrupt, and had turned the temple into a marketplace.

He sees Christ as a person who fought against corruption and hypocrisy in the Church in hopes that it would realign with the spirit of universal benevolence out of which it was ostensibly created. In this regard, his own interpretation echoes Weber's theory of charismatic renewal, in which the routinization of power structures leads to periodic bursts of charismatic energy and self-critique. Prudencio sees Christ as a historical reformer, not a religious messiah, and he has carried a strong belief in criticizing authority throughout his life.

Prudencio's rejection of Catholicism was linked to a belief in progressive, secular government, and his mention of the Cuban Revolution as a key event in his life is important for several reasons. First, it provides an example of how the arrival of radio in rural areas changed Honduran culture. The first Honduran radio channel opened in Tegucigalpa 1948, led by Cuban expatriates. Radios spread from the cities outward during the fifties, and the development of the battery-powered transistor radio enabled people in un-electrified rural areas to hear about national and international political events. Prudencio relied on the radio for information, and his rejection of the

legitimacy of religious knowledge was partly based on the new information he was receiving over the airways.

The Catholic Church had been the most important social institution in rural Honduras prior to the fifties, but the arrival of radio, followed by public school, signaled an important change not unlike that observed by Geertz (1957) in Indonesia at the same time, as ideological or political affiliations replaced local territorial communities as the primary modes of social integration in rural areas. This transformation from a community based on religious institutions and personal relationships to a small component of a national political community was an important part of the transition to modernity in rural Honduras.

As historian Tulio Halperin Donghi notes, "The Cuban Revolution set the tone of Latin American history in the 1960s" (1993:301), and the aftershocks of Castro's turn to socialism in 1960 had a significant impact on Honduran history. From the sixties until the early-nineties, U.S. foreign policy focused on preventing another hemispheric neighbor from becoming "the next Cuba." In Honduras, the U.S. State Department was pre-eminently concerned with nipping communism in the bud through a combination of military training and economic aid (Euraque 1996a:108-109, 112).

This policy had a direct impact on Prudencio's life. Early in his administration, John F. Kennedy initiated the Alliance for Progress as a combination of developmentalism and counter-revolution, which "recommended vigorous land-reform, rapid and broad-based industrialization, and expansion of the functions and resources of the state" (LaFeber 1984:294). Guided by modernization theorists, the Alliance for Progress intended to use a strong state and applied technology to promote economic

development, thereby diminishing the threat of social revolution by initiating broad reform.<sup>55</sup> The Alliance for Progress was intended to alleviate the social tensions that may have otherwise led to a socialist revolution, and it also expanded the "great society" philosophy of activist government beyond the borders of the United States.

In Honduras, the Alliance for Progress found an ally in President Villeda Morales, who held the presidency from 1957 to 1963 (LaFeber 1984:178). Villeda Morales expanded universal public education into rural areas, promoted labor rights, and passed a series of sweeping legislation which would redistribute vast tracts of unproductive land to peasants. He also cut off diplomatic relations with Cuba and denounced communism in order to separate his brand of reformism from Castro's (Euraque 1996a:114). During this period, organizations like the Peace Corps and the International Rural Development Bank became active in rural Honduras. Labor unions were given large loans by the U.S. International Cooperation Administration to provide improved housing for fruit company workers (Euraque 1996a:101), and progressive politics were transforming Honduran society in novel and important ways. A local progressive bourgeoisie had developed around the city of San Pedro Sula, and they allied with labor and peasant groups in the emergent Liberal Party.

While a student in the new public school in his hometown, Prudencio befriended a member of the first Peace Corps class in Honduras, Gary Fordham, who came to his village in 1963. At that time, Prudencio was constantly fighting with his mother, and considered running away from home. Gary became a mentor and big-brother to him, often buying him books, speaking with him about world events, and providing food

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<sup>55</sup> Escobar (1995) argues that the Alliance for Progress, and modernization theory in general, turned "poverty" into a social disease that could be eradicated by applied technology.

and shelter when he ran away from home. He recalls that his early intellectual development was influenced by the heady democratic idealism of the early-1960s, and that his relationship with the Fordham gave him a sense of political optimism and a firm belief in people's ability to change society through secular education. He would listen to current events on the radio with Gary, and discuss national and international politics.

In 1965, after years of fighting and periodic flights from home, Prudencio's mother expelled him from the family home for good. He had finished the mandatory basic education course, and planned to search of work in the US-owned banana plantations of the North Coast, an area that he had never before visited before but was, according to him, where "all the action in the country was going on, both politically and industrially." Indeed, there could hardly have been a better place for a young worker imbued with Kennedy-era idealism. The North Coast of Honduras had been economically and politically dominated by US-owned fruit companies since the late-nineteenth century, and had long been a symbol of U.S. economic imperialism in the region for left wing Latin American intellectuals, who saw Honduras as the paradigmatic "banana republic." Pablo Neruda best expressed this idea in his poem "La United Fruit Co," published in 1950 in *Canto General*:

Cuando sonó la trompeta, estuvo  
todo preparado en la tierra,  
y Jehova repartió el mundo  
a Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,  
Ford Motors, y otras entidades:  
la Compañía Frutera Inc.  
se reservó lo más jugoso,  
la costa central de mi tierra,  
la dulce cintura de América.

Bautizó de nuevo sus tierras

como "Repúblicas Bananas"

When the trumpet sounded  
everything was prepared on earth,  
and Jehovah gave the world  
to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,  
Ford Motors, and other corporations.  
The United Fruit Company  
reserved for itself the most juicy  
piece, the central coast of my world,  
the delicate waist of America.

It rebaptized these countries  
Banana Republics.

Despite the neo-colonialist legacy of the fruit companies, an unprecedented alliance between an urban bourgeoisie and banana-workers in the late-fifties led to social democratic reforms that were rare by Central American standards. By the early-sixties, the North Coast was the locus of much of Villeda Morales' reform efforts. It seemed that Honduras was heading towards a labor-capital compromise that was rare in the region, with the North Coast leading the way. Prudencio, then a teenager, wanted to be a part of it. The North Coast was the most modern and progressive region in the country.

This progress was halted in 1963, when Villeda Morales was deposed in a military coup and replaced by Army Colonel Oswaldo Lopez Arellano, a leader of the conservative National party. In 1965, the year that Prudencio set out for the Coast, the new dictator had scheduled an election under pressure from the U.S. to re-establish democracy. General Lopez was elected through a process that was clearly a sham, and took power in 1965. According to Euraque, "The 1963 coup had left mainstream liberalism in disarray " (1996a:123). The coup deeply affected Prudencio, and he decided not to continue with his plans to relocate to the coast. He was involved in a

nascent romance with the woman who would become his wife, and ended up moving in with his paternal grandparents, who lived in the country near La Quebrada.

He was happy living with his grandparents, and enjoyed the rural lifestyle. In the following years, he traveled around Central America, worked odd jobs, and got married. He also became increasingly active in agrarian politics, and saw the damage that export lumber corporations were inflicting on the environment around La Quebrada. In 1970, Prudencio decided to become a teacher and enrolled in the national teacher's college in Tegucigalpa. There, he became increasingly attracted to the political left, which had become more radical throughout the sixties, following the general political currents of the day. The emergence of the Lopez government temporarily thwarted the efforts of Honduran progressives. Kennedy's death led to the Johnson administration's support of General Lopez. The government turned to more hard-line anti-communist politics, and this turned many people against the liberal-democratic version of progress. Lopez Arellano attacked labor leaders as "subversives" throughout the late-sixties, and effectively alienated the Honduran left from mainstream liberalism for several years.

LaFeber details the demise of reformist policies following the Lopez coup, who he sees as a martinet controlled by a power block of U.S. businessmen, the military, and wealthy landowners. He writes, "The post-1963 Alliance assumed a different form in Honduras. Resembling the larger change in Latin American policy when Johnson replaced Kennedy, increased amounts of U.S. private capital appeared in Honduras as the López regime rolled back the Villeda Morales labor reforms and provided inviting opportunities for foreign investors" (LaFeber 1983:181). LaFeber focuses on the military's role in protecting the interests of the U.S. fruit companies and an emerging

cotton and cattle oligarchy at the expense of the peasantry. He sees López as representative of the Vietnam-era shift away from liberal reform in Latin America which would continue through the Nixon years and re-emerge under Reagan.

Prudencio's early admiration for the United States, formed during his friendship with Fordham and the days of Kennedy and Villeda Morales, turned to hostility as he entered the university. He organized his first political protest in opposition to a IBRD-funded plan for American education specialists to develop a curriculum for Honduran schools. The U.S.' support of the military dictatorship had eroded popular support for the American government through the sixties, and Honduran students were well aware of the 1968 student massacres in Mexico City and believed that the CIA was at least partly responsible.<sup>56</sup> Prudencio began to read Marx, Lenin, and Mao Tse Tung and was active in left-wing political groups.

Anti-imperialism, and particularly anti-Americanism, has long been a part of the culture of the Latin American left, and Honduras was certainly no exception. But domestic events turned students' critical energy away from the U.S. in 1969, when the invasion of Honduras by El Salvador in 1969 unified Honduran society against a foreign enemy, bringing domestic political rivals together in the cause. Student activism was directed at El Salvador rather than the US, and the new domestic unity led to a compromise between General Lopez Arellano and his former critics. Lopez Arellano began to institute his own social reforms beginning in the 1970s. Honduran rural society had become increasingly impoverished due to the impact of large-scale export production, and Arellano saw the potential for the sort of rural crisis that had

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<sup>56</sup> On October 2, 1968 the Mexican Army opened fire on a student demonstration in Tlatelolco in Mexico City, killing hundreds of demonstrators. See Zolov (1999) for an analysis of the origins of the massacre and its impact on Mexican politics and culture.

befallen El Salvador and precipitated that country's invasion of Honduras. Working with leaders of labor unions and peasant groups, he revived the sweeping agrarian reform that he had denounced years before, and he established ties to the industrial bourgeoisie that had opposed his coup.

Despite his radicalism, Prudencio began working for the Instituto Nacional Agrario, the institution responsible for carrying out the agrarian reform, in the early seventies. The INA was responsible for redistributing unproductive *latifundios* to landless peasant groups, and the fact that a progressive like Prudencio could become an employee of the military government speaks to the uniqueness of Honduran military reformism in the seventies. In 1975, Prudencio was involved in Honduras' most famous and ambitious land redistribution project in the Bajo Aguán valley, a fertile region where thousands of hectares of land had been abandoned by the banana companies. With the financial backing of the state, the INA attempted to develop peasant cooperatives for the production of African palm oil (Macias 2001). The cooperatives were organized and managed by government bureaucrats, who were involved in fraud and embezzlement. Prudencio was head of the INA worker's union, and consistently spoke out against the corruption which eventually led to the cooperative's demise.

The internal problems of the INA became moot, however, in late 1975, when a military coup deposed General Lopez Arellano and replaced him with the more conservative Colonel Melgar Castro, who would then be replaced by General Policarpo Paz García. By 1977, the agrarian reform was essentially halted by the newly conservative government, which was allied with the interests of large landholders who had long opposed the reform (Weaver 1990:69). After the coup, the



agrarian reform process relied on land seizures conducted by peasant groups without support from government agencies. Prudencio joined the national communist party (PCH) and became active in radical peasant organizations, frustrated with the ineffectiveness of the INA.

He developed a severe stomach ulcer in 1977, caused, he believes, by the stress of activism. A leader of the PCH arranged for him to travel to the Soviet Union for medical treatments. He spent almost a year in the USSR, and was disillusioned with the bleak totalitarian society that he encountered there. He was warned of the dangers of speaking critically of the Breshnev government, and was convinced that Soviet communism was on the decline. He returned to Honduras in 1979.

The events of 1979 were crucial to the history of Central America, and set in motion a series of forces which would quash whatever elements of mainstream progressive politics remained in Honduras. The Sandinistas successfully toppled the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, and the left wing FLNM began its civil war in El Salvador. Honduras became the focus of U.S. foreign policy, led by a hard-line anti-communist Army general named Gustavo Alvarez Martinez. The Honduran military was not under civilian control, and they had been trained and equipped by the United States since the sixties. Under the new government, General Alvarez was unquestionably the country's political strongman. A fanatical anti-communist, he had trained in Argentina and was the first to impose "dirty war" counterinsurgency tactics, such as death squads, kidnappings, and torture, in Honduras. The Nicaraguan revolutionaries had conducted operations in the Honduran mountains, and developed links with nascent Honduran revolutionary groups. People like Prudencio, who had been active

in peasant movements and left-wing politics, were labeled as "subversives" and faced unprecedented danger.

By this time, Prudencio was married with three young children, and decades of work as a political activist were wearing him down. The threat posed by the military leadership led Prudencio to back off from his public activism. He decided to move to La Quebrada in 1982 and start a coffee farm on land that was owned by his grandparents and in-laws. He became active in local politics, helping to organize a local committee that pressured the national government to grant La Quebrada autonomous status as a municipality. At the time, Honduran coffee was beginning to grow in importance on the world market. Global demand increased for the mild Arabica varieties that Honduras produced, and Prudencio's farm had a run of profitable harvests. The community as a whole was growing and prospering. However, Prudencio's personal history as an activist and member of the Honduran Communist Party (PCH) put him in danger of accusations of subversive activity by the paranoid *militares*. In 1985, he was roused from his bed and kidnapped by military police while his children watched. He was held for three weeks under suspicion of subversive activity, but does not voluntarily speak about the incident. When I asked what happened, he brusquely responded by saying, "Me jodieron," which is best translated as *They fucked with me*.

Although he was unwilling to speak in detail about the 1985 kidnapping, he admits that he was fortunate to survive. By that year, General Alvarez had been deposed by General Walter López, and the dirty war tactics persisted in a less brutal and maniacal form. Prudencio says that if Alvarez had still been in power, he would have certainly been murdered. Nevertheless, the events of 1985 left his family traumatized,

especially his children. He decided to focus on local political concerns, and in 1986, his efforts to win political autonomy for La Quebrada were rewarded when the community became an official municipality. Prudencio was named interim town secretary by governmental decree, pending elections the following year.

At first, the community had almost no infrastructure, such as public schools, road maintenance, or water. The leadership had to learn how to work within the political system in order to achieve funding from the national government for municipal projects. Prudencio's initial solicitations show a certain naïve optimism and a belief in the state as a care-giving patron. A letter to President Jose Simon Azcona, written months after the formation of the municipality is revealing. It reads:

Excelentísimo Señor Presidente de la Republica de Honduras  
Ingeniero José Simón Azcona

Por medio de la presente nos dirigimos a usted con el cariño que un pueblo le prodiga, dado a la connotación que tiene para nosotros, la trascendental obra que realizó al elevarnos de la categoría de aldea a la de Municipio; este gesto pasara a la Historia como una acción sublime hacia un pueblo que se le concedió el objetivo de su lucha, gracias a esa actuación justa, usted se convirtió en el Hijo Predilecto de este bello lugar y a quien deseamos tener en nuestro seno, ya sea como Presidente de nuestro país o como simple ciudadano, porque la esperanza que abrigamos cuando llego es su campana política, ya fue materializada por ella queremos rendirle un justo y merecido reconocimiento publico pues el pueblo debe rendir tributo al hombre que merece los Honores; esperamos considere nuestro deseo y nos de cualquier día la sorpresa que llegara hasta este rincón productivo.

Señor presidente: Así como un niño necesita de un tratamiento especial para su Desarrollo, también nuestro Municipio espera de su creador un tratamiento especial para alcanzar a corto plazo las metas que nos hemos puesto, que en líneas gruesas son...

Your Excellency Señor President of the Republic of Honduras, Engineer Jose Simon Azcona:

Through this letter, we address you with the love that a community bestows upon you, given the meaning that the transcendental task you accomplished by raising U.S. from

the category of village to municipality has for us. This gesture will pass into History as a sublime action that provided a community with the object of its struggle; thanks to this just action, you have become the Favorite Son of this beautiful place, who we wish to keep in our bosom, whether as President of our country or as a simple citizen, because the hope that you gave U.S. when you came here during your campaign has materialized, and for that we want to pay you just and deserved public recognition, as a community should pay tribute to a man that deserves the Honors; we hope that you consider our wishes and one of these days surprise U.S. by stopping by this productive little corner.

Señor President: Just as a child needs special treatment for its development, so our Municipality hopes that its creator provides special treatment so that it can reach the short term goals that we have proposed, which, in broad strokes are...]

Despite the flowery language, the local government's requests were for basic public goods--a road connecting them to a nearby town, funds for urban improvements, connections to the national electrical grid, a catastral survey, legal designation of boundaries, and assistance in a potable water project in partnership with CARE. In another letter, Prudencio requested a diagnostic study of community needs and asked that the Minister of Planning put them in touch with an international organization who could spearhead the development process. These seemed like reasonable requests, and they occurred as the country was transitioning to democratic rule. However, Prudencio was unprepared for the realities of Honduran party politics.

Honduran democracy remains quite corrupt, but before 1993, it was much worse. Prior to electoral reforms passed in 1993, voters could only vote for party tickets, rather than individual candidates. A voter could not choose the presidential candidate from one party and a mayor from another. The mayor was elected based on the percentage of votes his or her party's presidential candidate received in a given municipality. Mayoral candidates had vote-getting clout in the national elections, so

there was a great amount of corrupt dealing in order to get certain candidates to support a certain party.

The newly-formed government was open to the influence of Honduran party politics, where favor-swapping, patronage, and bribes are common. National politicians forged links with the new town leadership in a power grab, and a political rift quickly developed in the local government between allies of the Liberal and National parties. Prudencio, in typical iconoclastic fashion, refused to ally himself with either party, and regretted that local politics had quickly deteriorated into partisan sniping. As he puts it, "The local politicians were only concerned with their own interests and had no concern for the needs of the *pueblo*." He had become disillusioned with national bureaucracy while working at the INA, and now he saw that local politics were subject to the same patterns of corruption. The Nationalist party, longtime allies of the military government, took control of local politics and Prudencio was cut out of the local government. He began to feud with one of the town's largest coffee growers and most powerful Nationalist politicians. In the meantime, the town remained without potable water, roads, or electricity.

The late-eighties and early-nineties brought sweeping changes to Honduras, due in part to Honduras' strategic position in the Cold War power struggle but also to the wave of democratization that spread throughout the world after 1989. In 1990, the peace plan initiated by Costa Rican president Oscar Sanchez Arias led to the establishment of democratic elections in Nicaragua, ending the threat of guerilla warfare in Honduras or the need for large-scale military aid. The demise of Marxist leadership in Nicaragua, coupled with the breakup of the USSR, ended Honduras' position as "main girder in the bridge" (LaFeber 1983) of the US' hemispheric security

strategy. The amount of U.S. aid to Honduras declined dramatically, and much of the remaining funds were intended to strengthen local democratic institutions and decentralize politics. Honduras held democratic elections in 1990, electing the Nationalist Rafael Callejas. Corruption and human rights violations could no longer be excused as necessary evils that ensured "stability." Financial transparency and support of the rule of law became important priorities, as "efficiency" replaced stability as the guiding principle of national progress.

With the end of the "red" threat came new interest in strong democracy and human rights, as well as economic policies geared towards market liberalization and global competitiveness.<sup>57</sup> USAID, the World Bank, and other lending agencies began to focus on fiscal discipline as a requirement for development assistance. The IMF created a fiscal austerity program for Honduras in 1989, and USAID withheld funds as punishment for non-compliance. The structural adjustment programs instituted in Honduras followed the neoliberal model that the IMF and World Bank instituted around the world (Noé Pino 1995). As a response to the debt crisis of the eighties, highly-indebted countries like Honduras aimed to cut spending in order to stabilize national currencies and attract private capital. Honduras wooed light manufacturing companies--mainly garment sweatshops--with tax-free zones and low labor costs. Investment in non-traditional agricultural products like berries, cucumbers, mangoes, flowers, and broccoli was encouraged by USAID, and shrimp-farming for export became one of the country's most profitable industries.

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<sup>57</sup> Honduras has made great strides in fighting corruption and enforcing human rights since the return of democracy, but they remain two of the most pressing issues for the country. Not one military or political leader has been convicted of human rights abuses, despite the efforts of a national human rights commission.

Centralized social programs were expensive and inefficiently run, and in this new environment, public expenditures needed to be cut significantly for Honduras to maintain its standing with creditors. This new tight-fisted approach did not bode well for rural areas, and especially La Quebrada, which had virtually no public services and was desperately in need of state support. NGOs became increasingly important actors in the social services sector, filling the void left by the cessation of military aid.

In 1989, the breakdown of the International Coffee Agreement caused coffee prices to plummet, intensifying the need for assistance in La Quebrada. During this period, Prudencio forged alliances with NGOs that would become important throughout the nineties. In 1989, the national forestry service (COHDEFOR) conducted a feasibility study for a municipal water system, and determined that pollution from certain coffee farms was contaminating the town's water sources. Prudencio began a campaign to stop one of the farmers, his main political rival, from polluting the water from his heavily-fertilized field. The influence of his history as an activist was clear in pamphlets posted around town, where he used language like, "People of La Quebrada, divided we are many but weak; united we are few but strong" and "Until the final victory," but his goals were far from radical. He sought to develop a community-wide committee for the protection of local watersheds. His request was denied by the town's mayor, so he organized public rallies. Nevertheless, a judge ruled in favor of the polluting landowner under questionable circumstances. Despite affidavits from the national environmental ministry supporting Prudencio's claim, the judge ruled that the landowner could continue to pollute. Although his campaign ended in disappointment, Prudencio made professional contacts with agronomists funded by USAID, which was working with CARE to improve hillside agricultural practices in

Honduras. He saw his new NGO allies as a way out of the frustrating corruption of mainstream politics.

In the early nineties, Prudencio began to organize an association of elected neighborhood representatives. He focused his energies on local democratic participation, organizing La Quebrada's first open town meeting in 1996, with the assistance of three NGOs. He had come full-circle in his political opinions. His early belief in strong centralized government and technical assistance had been challenged by his experiences with bureaucratic corruption and state hypocrisy. His new approach saw the town meeting model of "pure democracy" as the foundation of effective popular rule, and he bemoaned the political flaws and inefficiencies of centralization.

In 1998, the catastrophe caused by Hurricane Mitch led to a tremendous infusion in development aid in Honduras. Prudencio had been active in promoting strong systems of local governance in La Quebrada, and development agencies were eager to work in places where, ideally, a broad coalition of political factions developed a community's agenda. Therefore, La Quebrada was a natural fit for community-driven development work. In early 1999, Prudencio became the local leader of two related development projects funded by USDA and USAID and managed by Cornell University. The first was an attempt to develop a community-driven diagnostic study in which elected neighborhood-leaders developed a hierarchy of the community's needs (something Prudencio had been working towards for a decade). The second project was an organic coffee cooperative and processing facility, of which Prudencio was the co-president.



The coffee cooperative was the victim of bad timing. During its first crop year, world coffee prices hit a fifty-year low, and the co-op sold its crop for below the cost of production. It managed to hang on, with a few members, for another season, but it had disappeared by 2003. Prudencio's sons migrated to the U.S. and were working as house-painters in suburban New Jersey. He had retired from local politics in frustration, and spent much of the year in Tegucigalpa, returning to La Quebrada for the coffee harvest. One afternoon, we were speaking about the fortunes of migrants, and whether returnees could help the economic prospects of the community. "Look," he told me, "A few people might come back with a truck or a gold chain from work in the States, but they will never create any long term future for the people here. That is something that can't be done without *politics*. And here, *politics* are not possible unless you are a criminal."

Prudencio's life story encapsulates the transition from modernity to postmodernity in Honduras. His political life began as rural Honduras was beginning to develop as a modern nation-state. He feuded with his mother over the relative value of secular education versus religion, and he eventually became a teacher in the public schools, demonstrating his belief in modern, secular concepts of progress. During the early days of the Alliance for Progress, his exposure to the Peace Corps cemented his faith in progressive democracy. He participated in the agrarian reform movement and state-directed development, but was frustrated by the corruption, inefficiency, and hypocrisy he encountered in the bureaucracy. He turned to Soviet communism as a model of progress, but his belief in Communism was shattered by his trip to the USSR in the late-seventies. His persecution by the military government in the eighties forced him to take on a more moderate agenda as a matter of survival. He turned to local democracy and environmentalism in the eighties, and forged alliances with non-

governmental institutions. By the nineties, he had completely lost faith in mainstream government and turned to non-governmental solutions to local problems. By the time I met him, he had embraced sustainable entrepreneurialism--organic coffee production--which was exactly the sort of market-driven social program that the NGOs were promoting at that time. The failure of the coffee project and his sons' migration had left him disillusioned and cynical about Honduran politics.

In present-day La Quebrada, NGOs play a vital role in local politics, which could be seen as a new form of political engagement, rather than depoliticization. One organization, Proyecto Aldea Global (Global Village Project) has become almost a state within a state. The town's mayor appeals to Aldea Global's leadership for funding for social programs, and the project has even provided basic infrastructure, like roads and water, that the Honduran government has not been able to provide. Aldea Global is nominally a Christian organization, but it does not actively proselytize, and it works in partnership with American Jewish World Service as well as secular charities like the Kellogg Foundation. As an NGO, Aldea Global is outside of the political system, and is therefore unaccountable for its successes and failures. Of course, it must follow the laws of the country, but the project prides itself on its ability to cut through bureaucratic red tape and deliver results without involving the political establishment. The success or failure of its projects does not translate into political power. Although its leaders stress community involvement, Aldea Global is a non-democratic organization that relies on external funding from private donors or government grants. NGOs like Aldea Global provide important social services that cash-strapped states cannot. However, their newfound power symbolizes the process of depoliticization that has occurred in rural Honduras. Even "the government" has given up on government, viewing NGO activity as a pragmatic way to provide

services with limited resources. The state plays a relatively minor role in rural development while the political leadership focuses on export growth in urban manufacturing. The contracting of rural social services to NGOs removes the state from accountability and marginalizes rural politics from the mainstream.

The rising power of groups like Aldea Global demonstrates the severance of the pact between Honduran state and nation, especially in the countryside. One of the ironies of the Honduran transition to democracy, post-1989, is the fact that mainstream political institutions have played a decreasing role in local politics, while NGOs, which are outside the boundaries of democratic governance, have risen in power. It is no wonder that people feel marginalized from domestic politics, when NGOs like Aldea Global perform even the most basic functions of government, such as road construction. Taking Prudencio's story into account, we can see how dramatically the role and responsibility of government has changed since the days of the Alliance for Progress. His story fittingly explains the origins of the current depoliticized climate in La Quebrada.

In the following chapters, I describe two movements that provide strategies for social improvement within this depoliticized climate. In Chapter 5, I describe two religious movements that provide worshipers with philosophies of self-empowerment, and, I argue, have filled the gap left by the demise of secular politics. Chapter 6 describes the fair trade coffee movement, one of the few popular strategies that have been devised to improve social conditions in La Quebrada and places like it. Fair trade shifts the responsibility for regulation of the coffee market away from states and international organizations, and towards individual consumers. Although both of

these movements contain political elements, they are ultimately products of the process of depoliticization described here.

## Chapter 5

### Broken Idols: Religious Belief, Mediation, and Action

Jesús es más que un templo de lujo con tendencia barroca.  
Él sabe que total a la larga esto no es más que roca.  
La iglesia se lleva en el alma y en los actos no se te olvide  
que Jesús, hermanos míos, es verbo no sustantivo

Jesus is more than a luxurious Baroque style temple. He knows that in the end, this is nothing more than rock. You carry the church in your soul and in your acts. Don't forget, my brothers, that Jesus is a verb and not a noun.

Pop song by Guatemalan singer Ricardo Arjona, "Jesús verbo no sustantivo" (Jesus: verb, not noun)<sup>58</sup>

In the previous chapter, I documented the transition from progressive, state-centric modernization to depoliticized postmodernity in rural Honduran politics. In this chapter, I will describe how this transition has affected contemporary religious thought and practice.

The ideological similarities between religious and political movements in each respective historical era are striking: During the era of agrarian reform and state-centric modernization, Honduran Catholics came to embrace politicized religious movements that synthesized Catholicism with *campesino* politics. These movements generally followed the two major modernist ideologies of the Cold War--social democracy and Marxism. In the early sixties, Catholic Social Movements (CSMs) opposed Communism (mainly Castroism) and followed a reformist democratic model, often funded by USAID, assisted by the CIA and other institutional branches of the Alliance for Progress (White 1977:276).

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<sup>58</sup> This song was a huge hit throughout Latin America in the eighties. I noticed that it appealed equally to active and passive Christians in La Quebrada. I twice saw people break into tears while singing along with this song on the radio.

By the late-sixties, segments of these movements began to embrace Marxism, and were influenced by the liberation theology developed by Paulo Freire in Brazil.<sup>59</sup> The Marxist CSMs, especially the "Celebration of the Word of God" directed peasant land seizures and encouraged violent opposition to the dominant capitalist classes. They drew philosophical inspiration from dependency theory and other forms of anti-imperialist thought. The democratic CSMs still survived alongside the Marxists, but they distanced themselves from their more aggressive tactics of the latter group. The relationship between the democratic CSMs, USAID, and the CIA was not a secret, and their increasingly close relationship led Honduran populist leaders to turn to more radical philosophies.<sup>60</sup> By the seventies, the radical CSMs had great popular appeal, and the "Celebration of the Word of God" was a force in rural politics. The reformist/radical split that marked secular politics mapped almost perfectly onto Catholic institutions, with social democratic movements forming in the early-sixties and generally being usurped by more radical movements by the late-sixties and seventies.

Protestant evangelicals were active in Honduras beginning in the nineteenth century, but their impact was limited. The country had an insignificant (<10%) Protestant population until the eighties. Evangelical missionaries were funded and assisted by fanatical anti-communists in the U.S. (such as Lt. Col. Oliver North) who saw their

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<sup>59</sup> These movements may have received financial/institutional support from the Soviet Union, but the nature of their relationship has not been studied.

<sup>60</sup> For example, one of the most important democratic CSMs, *Acción Cultural Popular Hondureña* (ACPH), was funded by USAID from 1968-1972. The increased interference of USAID's leadership alienated ACPH's leaders, who moved towards more radical models of peasant action by the late sixties (White 1977:276-286). The democratic CSMs based their philosophy on a model developed by Roger Vekemans, a Belgian Jesuit in Chile who "became a conduit for millions of dollars from the CIA" (Stoll 1990:14).

religious proselytizing as part of the fight against the spread of Marxism, which was embodied in Catholic liberation theology, a part of the Sandinista revolutionary platform in Nicaragua that threatened to spread through Central America (Stoll 1990:135-179).

In his book *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (1990) Stoll argued that evangelical Protestantism provided pragmatic solutions to problems of rural society that were far more convincing than those offered by liberation theology. Although he spends much of the book arguing that the rise of evangelical Protestantism was not part of some nefarious anti-Marxist plot, revelations about the spread of Protestantism in Honduras forced him to reconsider. Oliver North had indeed used U.S. strategic resources to support Protestant evangelicalism in Honduras, confirming the conspiracy theory that he had tried so hard to refute. Stoll writes:

This, then, is what stood behind the buzzing activity of North American evangelists in Honduras. Behind all the coming and going--into restricted areas, through connections with the U.S. embassy, on military aircraft, bringing relief supplies to refugees and ministering to contras--was a lieutenant colonel in the White House, orchestrating evangelists into sensitive areas to hand out gifts and ideology (Stoll 1990:325-326)

He continues:

To those who distrust and fear evangelical growth, Oliver North and his friends have confirmed the view that this is the result of strategic U.S. planning. That evangelism is a spiritual con game, of attracting Latin Americans with dollars, working closely with the power structure, and following orders from Washington. This is the conspiracy explanation for evangelical growth in Latin America, an explanation widely accepted in the Catholic Church, on the left, and wherever sectarianism divides the poor against each other. It is not the picture of I wanted to draw when I started this book; it is the folk mythology I wanted to refute, not affirm. Yet Oliver North and his evangelists have done this great disservice to their brethren: they have shown that it is true (327).

As Stoll recognizes, there was indeed a direct historical relationship between Cold War military activity and the rise of Protestantism in Honduras, but this historical explanation of the origins of Honduran evangelism cannot explain why so many people have continued to believe in evangelical religions in the fifteen years since. The close ties between some Protestant churches and the U.S. government were well-known, yet these churches continue to grow by the day. Something about their message must resonate with popular experience, and a historical account of their origins doesn't begin to address their contemporary appeal. As Stoll predicted, "The more important story is what is going on at the popular level" (327). This essay seeks to explain the contemporary appeal of Honduran evangelical movements at "the popular level."

At present, evangelical Protestantism is the most dynamic and fastest growing form of religion in rural Honduras.<sup>61</sup> I believe that a great deal of its power comes from its tendency to frame social issues as the product of individual choices. This philosophy is ideologically powerful at a time when the relationship between state and nation has been transformed, and rural people can no longer look to the state as representative of their interests. Here, I will present ethnographic data from La Quebrada to analyze the appeal of two recent religious movements, which stems from their relatively unmediated message of the power of the autonomous individual. Although the specific doctrines of Protestantism vary greatly, they all share one fundamental difference from the Christian Social Movements that were so important in the sixties and seventies: The new religions frame social problems as the consequences of individual choices, and they tend to ignore politics at an abstract level. This emphasis

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<sup>61</sup> According to various studies reproduced by David Stoll (1990:337), the Protestant population of Honduras was less than 2% of the total population in 1960, and less than 10% during the mid-eighties. According to contemporary estimates, the Protestant population of Honduras is over 35%.



on the power of the individual, abstracted from collective mediating institutions, is a cultural consequence of the demise of agrarian politics in Honduras.

The difference between evangelical movements and the modern CSMs is clear. The contemporary movements no longer explain the problems faced by rural society as the consequences of sociopolitical factors, as did both the Democratic and Marxist versions of "social Christianity." Instead, the new churches focus almost exclusively on individual morality and various formulations of "personal responsibility." The individual has become the basic unit of social reform, and secular theories of progress have lost ground to a depoliticized emphasis on individual morality. This theory of individual power has ideological force at a time when the relationship between nation and state has eroded, NGOs assume the role of many state functions, and socially-destructive practices like undocumented migration are viewed as economic resources.

In this essay, I focus on the popular appeal of two religious movements that have arisen in La Quebrada over the past fifteen years. The first movement is a relatively ascetic Pentecostal congregation that emphasizes personal sobriety, discipline, and the fear of damnation. The second movement is an avowedly libertarian Christian cult that has no concept of sin or damnation and attracts members with a message of individual responsibility and freedom from guilt.<sup>62</sup> Both religions emphasize personal empowerment and self-improvement, but they do so in vastly different ways.

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<sup>62</sup> I will use the word "evangelical" to describe the Pentecostal Baptist church. In Latin America, "evangelical" (*evangelico/a*) means Protestant. Readers should note that the Spanish word for "gospel" is *evangelio*. The term *evangelico* draws attention to the fact that these churches proselytize, ie "spread the gospel."

This chapter follows a discussion of Honduran politics in order to draw a connection between evangelical religious movements and depoliticization. These new religious movements in La Quebrada are directed towards the resolution of life's problems and the empowerment of individuals. As the previous chapter illustrates, for almost fifty years, secular conceptions of modernization seemed to have surpassed the role of religion as a source of moral order in rural Honduras. The recent popularity of religious movements should be placed in this historical context. They do not represent a return to "tradition," but a response to the failure of secular ideologies to produce satisfactory results.

In La Quebrada, the evangelical turn began in 1989. The collapse of the International Coffee Agreement, the cessation of economic aid from the United States, and the institution of fiscal austerity measures all began in 1989, but in La Quebrada, the collapse of coffee had the greatest impact. Between 1989 and 1993, coffee prices were cut in half, leading to increased rural poverty and violence.<sup>63</sup> People had nowhere to turn for secular solutions to these problems. After the collapse of agrarian politics, described in the previous chapter, there was no guiding secular theory of progress. Kennedy-era progressive democracy was either seen as an anachronistic relic of an idealistic age or a corrupt offshoot of American imperialism. Mainstream political parties were left in a corrupt shambles, shackled by external debt and a legacy of fiscal incompetence. Revolutionary politics had led to a decade of fear and tumult

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<sup>63</sup> The impact of the end of the ICA on the Honduran coffee industry was not entirely negative. Honduras had little political power within the International Coffee Organization, and its annual quotas were relatively low due to its peripheral position within the institutional structure of the ICO. The end of the ICA allowed the country to export more coffee by volume, but prices dropped too low to make up for this increased volume. Additionally, price volatility (not necessarily a net decline) is especially difficult for small farmers, and the end of the ICA certainly made prices more volatile, even if they may have risen at times.

that no one wished to revisit. In this atmosphere of political failure, religious movements have filled the political void left by the demise of secular politics.

I was consistently surprised at the passionate and coherent explanations of religious belief that people in La Quebrada provided. I was equally surprised by the absence of analogous debate over the virtues of political parties or secular philosophies.

Strangely, membership in Honduras' two major political parties, the Nationalists and Liberals, was taken as a matter of tradition rather than volition. One was a "red" (Liberal) or a "blue" (Nationalist) by virtue of membership in a "red" or "blue" family, and the specific beliefs of each party were rarely discussed. When politics were discussed, the discourse was highly personalized (e.g. "so and so is corrupt," "so and so is a man of the people"). There was not much ideological difference between the two major parties. Religion, normally the domain of tradition, was a topic of debate and personal choice, while politics was the domain of tradition, uncritically accepted. These churches filled the role normally played by political parties in modern states--they were domains where people developed and debated ways to improve social conditions.

As I will emphasize in this chapter, the new churches provide a great deal of meaning and personal satisfaction to participants, and they have helped many people deal with hardship. The evangelical churches have been quite beneficial to many communities. However, these churches intend to empower people through individual moral guidance rather than collective political action, and they provide easy individual solutions to complex social problems.

Both of the new religious movements that I focus on believe that other faiths have failed to adequately explain the nature of social reality. Both faiths contain a doctrine of "self-help" that is especially attractive in times of crisis and change, but their versions of "self-help" are opposite. In the following section, I investigate how these two decidedly different religious movements emerged from the same general sociological conditions. Do these two religions seek to resolve similar social dilemmas? Does a person need to adhere to a strict code of conduct in order to feel "born again" or does a doctrine of absolute liberty provide a person with the same sense of pride and power over their lives? Do these philosophies have some basic functional similarities behind their manifest philosophical differences?

It is a known fact that proselytizing faiths tend to thrive in "burnt-over" societies (Mintz 1974:258). Revivalist churches are often "the churches of the detribalized, the decultured, and the disinherited. They fill many needs for lower-class people who, one way or another, have lost their stake in 'the old ways'" (Mintz 1974:258). Pentecostal Baptist churches provide members with a new interpretation of reality, a sense of group solidarity, and a clear path to a better life. They also provide recreation, a social support network, and the ability to actively participate in a valued status-group for marginal members of society (Martin 1996). Throughout modern history, revivalist churches have located the source of social decay in the cultural sphere. They often prohibit music, dance, art, clothing, or other behaviors that they associate with either a destructive, encroaching modernity or a diabolical, retrograde "tradition." In La Quebrada, Pentecostal churches contain both elements: They prohibit pop music and trendy clothing, two elements of a "sinful" modernity, and they prohibit Catholic festivals and the worship of patron saints, two practices that are common parts of traditional rural culture.

Another significant aspect of Pentecostal Baptist churches is that they tend to win adherents through spectacles of mass healing, speaking in tongues, and trances. The functional interpretation of religious revival de-emphasizes the experiential importance of these phenomena (Csordas 2002). Miraculous acts give people a sense of proximity to and limited control over a transcendent power. These acts condense the power to heal afflictions, both physical and psychological, into moments of great drama that provide evidence of the efficacy of faith. The social aspects of church membership are vitally important, but often follow from the initial experience of miraculous power that "convinces" people to follow a new faith.<sup>64</sup>

The importance of healing to conversion events begs the question: If people are drawn to revivalist faiths that can cure physical and emotional afflictions, then why should these faiths emphasize personal guilt and the struggle against temptation? Doesn't this emphasis on guilt create as much suffering as it alleviates? Logically speaking, would not a libertarian faith, such as the one I describe in this essay, provide people with a greater sense of power and control over their lives by removing the oppressive specter of guilt? If the appeal of the revivalist faiths is based on the curing of all sorts of afflictions, can libertarianism be as empowering as asceticism?

### **Religious Diversity in La Quebrada**

In La Quebrada, there are so many Christian sects to choose from that religion has become an individual choice rather than a ritualized social obligation. There are fifteen

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<sup>64</sup> This point is vividly demonstrated in Mintz' description of the conversion of Taso Zayas in *Worker in the Cane*. Unfortunately, Mintz' sociohistorical interpretation of conversion de-emphasizes the experiential component.

different churches in town: five Catholic churches in different neighborhoods, eight Pentecostal churches, one Jehovah's Witness hall, and a fringe Christian church, Creciendo en Gracia [Growing in Grace], devoted to a Puerto Rican man named Jose de Jesus Miranda who is called "The Apostle." The largest of these churches, the Catholic church in the town center, has about five hundred congregants. The size of the Pentecostal congregations varies from about one hundred to twenty-five. I calculate the town's population to be about 65% Catholic and 35% Protestant.<sup>65</sup>

All of the non-Catholic churches are relatively new. The first Protestant church was formed in 1989, and all of the others sprouted up in the nineties. Catholicism remains the most popular religion, and it is the baseline against which all other sects define themselves. All of the current adult members of the new churches were born into Catholic families, and most discussions of the relative merits of evangelical churches begin with, "I don't believe in Catholicism because...." One is a Catholic unless they choose otherwise. Therefore, evangelical religions always contain an element of voluntarism that is absent from Catholicism (Martin 1990:31-42), and this makes adherents of the new churches more vocal and enthusiastic about their choice of faiths. Catholics tend to be passive participants, rarely attending church services, while the Protestants tend to be loyal attendees and zealous advocates of their faith. This enthusiasm is helpful to the researcher, because people are quite comfortable explaining *why* they believe in a certain religion versus another. Critique and introspection are inherent in proselytizing faiths, because people often *choose* to believe in them, sometimes breaking with family tradition. Although there are now

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<sup>65</sup> These numbers are based on a survey of clergy that I conducted in 2002. I asked the leaders of all the churches in town to estimate the number of people who would they would consider "members" of their churches. A survey conducted by Le Vote Harris was published in the Honduran news magazine "Hablemos Claro" in January 2005. In this survey, 56% of people in the Distrito Central described themselves as Catholic, and 36% self-described as "Evangelicals."

many young second-generation Pentecostals, the adult leaders of the churches are recent converts.

The first evangelical churches were founded in La Quebrada in 1989, just as the International Coffee Agreement was suspended and coffee prices plummeted to historic lows. There is almost certainly a connection between the coffee crash and the rise of the new churches. These churches offer a "second birth" and a solution to life's problem, an ideology that becomes more appealing when problems are especially acute. Although the majority of Catholic-to-Protestant conversions occurred during the coffee crisis, no one that I spoke with said that economic conditions directly influenced their conversion. Most people claimed that they converted to the new churches because they felt shame over personal shortcomings like alcoholism, theft, adultery, out-of-wedlock births, or violence. Some of these behaviors, such as theft and violence, become more common in times of economic distress. Other behaviors, like alcoholism and out-of-wedlock births, are more destructive when income is scarce because they consume domestic resources. Elizabeth Brusco (1997) has argued that part of the appeal of Protestantism comes from its economic advantages to poor families. Women are able to "domesticate" destructive male behaviors like gambling and drinking. This interpretation certainly applied to families in La Quebrada, such as the family of Wilmer Ulloa, described in Chapter 2. At the same time, it is too mechanistic to locate the appeal of these religions only in the economic sphere. The economic crisis caused by the coffee collapse is certainly related to the first wave of Protestant conversions. Some people turned to the new churches to solve problems that were made more widespread and severe by the coffee collapse of 1989, but this was only part of its appeal.

I was in La Quebrada during another major coffee crisis (2000-2003). I witnessed the rapid growth of the Centro Educativo Creciendo en Gracia. I had not heard of this sect and at first believed it to be a local cult. However, I later discovered that the church has hundreds of thousands of followers, branches in twenty-four countries, an international television network, a record label, a flashy website with a twenty-four hour radio feed, and weekly sermons broadcast all over the world (including weekly sermons on my local public access television station in Massachusetts). Creciendo en Gracia (CEG) came to La Quebrada in 1997, and the congregation was founded by a member of one of the town's wealthiest families who served as its first preacher. Although the church is still strongly associated with this family and some its close allies, it has expanded to include members of all social classes and it now has about seventy-five adult followers.

Its members saw the Pentecostal Baptism as bound by oppressive rules that were counter to the true message of Jesus Christ. One of its mottos was "The devil has been destroyed." It stressed the fact that people were not forced to commit sins due to the devil's influence; they were responsible for their own actions. As the pastor once told me, "Bad and perverse people do bad and perverse things. Jesus eradicated sin from the world, and destroyed the devil with his sacrifice." This philosophy was seen as a liberating call for personal responsibility by some and a license for absolute self-interest (without regard for consequences) by others. CEG did not use charismatic healing as a proselytizing technique. Simply by believing in their philosophy of a guilt-free life, people could be healed of a major emotional affliction.



### **Ethnographic Profile: Yadira Ulloa**

Yadira Ulloa was a devoted and passionate member of the Iglesia Cristo Misionera, La Quebrada's largest Pentecostal church. She was twenty-four years old, unmarried, and cared for her father, five-year old daughter, and brother. She worked as a maid year-round and picked coffee during the harvest season. Each day, she washed and mended clothes, prepared meals, chopped firewood, and carried water. She helped her daughter get ready for school, and cared for her two infant nieces as well. She worked tirelessly, and was known as one of the fastest female coffee harvesters in town, picking as much as seven hundred pounds in a single day.

The church was the main focus of her life. Every morning, other women of the church would stop by to chat about their plans for the evening. They would discuss what they would wear to church, gossip about other people in the congregation, or discuss the amount of tithes collected the previous night. They were active in collecting funds to start "campos blancos" or new churches in outlying communities. They sold raffle tickets, donuts, and pineapple fritters door to door to help purchase materials for the new churches.

The Cristo Misionera church is a Pentecostal Baptist congregation. Its founder is said to have received the holy spirit in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico in the early sixties, and his speech in tongues (glossolalia) is taken as evidence of his access to divinity.

Congregants sometimes speak in tongues during particularly exciting points in the services, and people are water-baptized after they have spoken in tongues. The most important part of a baptism is the confession of faith. The confession is as follows:

Señor Jesús; Soy un pecador/a y vengo a ti para pedirte perdón por todos mis pecados. Yo se que te he ofendido y no he vivido una vida que sea de agrado para ti. Pero en tu misericordia te pido que me perdone. Entra en mi corazón y lávame con tu sangre borra mis pecados. Yo creo de corazón que moriste y resucitaste por mis pecados y ahora lo confieso con mi boca. Te invito para seas el Salvador y Señor de mi vida; Gracias Señor Jesús, Gracias por tu perdón. Soy una nueva criatura! Amen.

Lord Jesus: I am a sinner and I come to you to ask forgiveness for all my sins. I know that I have offended you and that I have not lived a life that is to your liking. But in your mercy I beg that you forgive me. Enter in my heart and bathe me with you blood, cleanse my sins. I believe in my heart that you died and were reborn for my sins and now I confess it with my own mouth. I invite you to be the Savior and Lord of my life. Thank you Lord Jesus. Thank you for your forgiveness. I am a new creature! Amen.

This prayer is a confession of sin and a plea for forgiveness. It displays the theme of a "second birth" which is common in evangelical religions. The second sentence (...I have not lived a life that is to your liking.) expresses sorrow over a previous manner of living, and the last few sentences ask the Lord to "be the Savior" of a "new creature." This prayer is rather similar to Catholic prayers of contrition and prayers of to the holy spirit, which also emphasize the spirit's ability to enter into a worshiper. However, the Catholic prayers tend not to emphasize rebirth. Also, in this case, sinners are not required to confess to a priest, nor do they pray to angels or saints, as do Catholics. Divine power manifests itself in incomprehensible speech and uncontrolled action,

which demonstrates its transcendent nature.<sup>66</sup> From this prayer alone, we see two definitive characteristics of evangelical faith: a direct, unmediated relationship with divinity, and the power of that divinity to give people a "new life." These two factors are key to the local appeal of evangelical religion in La Quebrada.

As would be expected, most of the members of the church have experienced some personal crisis that led them to search for a second chance. Yadira began to attend church after she became pregnant from a man who had no interest in caring for their child. Her father joined after battling alcoholism. Another man went to jail after being caught stealing coffee from a neighbor's farm and turned to the church after he was released from jail. Two women had committed adultery while their husbands resided in the United States. The ability to be "born again" through baptism attracts people to the church, but it only part of the appeal. As Mintz and Martin have emphasized, these churches provide recreation, a sense of belonging, and a network of mutual support for members.

For Yadira, entertainment was an important part of the appeal of church. She lived in a home with no electricity, and, in the church, she could spend a few hours each night singing and clapping to festive music with friends. Before the town was put on the national electrical grid, the church was one of the few buildings that were illuminated at night, and people would congregate alongside of the church to chat, taking advantage of the halo of light that it cast on the street. For Yadira, going to church was a fun alternative to sitting at home, working, or chatting by firelight. It gave her

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<sup>66</sup> Csordas (2002:76) has argued that glossolalia should be viewed as a non-semantic behavior that reveals the "grounding of language in natural life, a bodily act." This view does not address the collective aspect of glossolalia as it emerges in ecstatic ritual. Here, Csordas' focus on individual experience moves too far away from social explanations.

an opportunity to dress up in her best clothes, and proudly walk through town as part of a group that *mattered*. As an unmarried single-mother who did not finish high school, her social status was relatively low. The church marked her as *somebody*, and she took pride in slowly walking to church with friends each evening, stopping by people's homes to chat along the way. She made sure that people saw her as a member of the church and she was a vocal and effective proselytizer. On Sunday market-days, she would stand in the middle of the market stalls, singing and praying with friends, hoping to "win" souls.

As Martin has argued, part of the appeal of new Pentecostal churches is that they provide a voluntary association where women like Yadira can be active and valued participants. Her participation in fund-raising activities gave her experience and responsibility handling money and a chance to be part of a project that had visible effects in the community. Her proselytizing gave her a public persona as well. Though her participation in the church, she became an important part of one of the town's most powerful subgroups. As a low-status, under-educated young woman, she would not have this opportunity in any other group in town. The church gave her a feeling of individual power and pride.

The church's inclusiveness is another part of its appeal. Services follow a weekly schedule that gives everyone a chance to lead the service at some point. Mondays are devoted to bible study, Tuesday is the "Culto de Damas" and services are led by women, Wednesday is "Culto de Niños" and children lead various songs and prayers. Thursday is "Culto en el Hogar," where a particular family hosts services in their home. Fridays, the "Culto de Caballeros" are led by adult men. Saturdays (Culto de Jóvenes) are led by teens, and Sundays are "Culto de Todos," where no group is

singled out. The church provides a specific time for each social group to be the focus of attention. Age, gender, and class distinctions exist within the church (in fact, women and men must sit on opposite sides of the church), but every social group is given equal standing, as long as they adhere to the tenets of the church. There is an informal weekly prayer meeting for the most active members of the church, and participation in this group of "hardcore" adherents is the most noticeable social division within the church. All but two of the fifteen to twenty "hardcore" participants are women. They fast for a day before the prayer meetings, which last for several hours inside a private home. These meetings often culminate in the entire group speaking in tongues.

The church also provides a network of mutual support that is especially important for single mothers and people who depend on remittances from relatives in the United States. Church-members take care of each others' children and run errands for friends when they go to the city to collect remittance checks or shop. Membership in the church creates a bond of trust among people that are not related. The church's strict moral code assures people that members are disciplined and trustworthy. It provides an extended family that is important for people who are disassociated from normal bonds of kinship and neighborhood, such as recovering alcoholics and thieves.

The church also performs a therapeutic function. Before each service begins, congregants place their heads on the pews and kneel on the ground, facing away from the altar. They quietly pray for forgiveness, murmuring words to themselves. The women usually sob quietly as they do this, while the men, who are far outnumbered by the women, rarely cry. Small groups will sometimes form, where women's heads are only a few inches from each other on the pews. In this case, the other women can hear

what the people near them are saying. They hear their friends ask forgiveness from god, and the mutual experience of sorrowful prayer creates a strong bond of sympathy between them. This "silent" prayer lasts for about a half hour before the service starts.

All prayers begin with the same call-and-response welcome, in which the prayer leader says, "Dios le bendiga" (God bless you!) and the crowd responds with the same blessing. Then the leader asks, "Quien vive?" (Who lives?) and the group responds, "Dios." Then the leader responds with "Gloria a Dios." The singing begins slowly, a drummer and electric guitar player start out playing softly but build to a false climax just before the pastor begins his sermon. Following the sermon, the singing becomes even more intense, and this is usually the point where people catch the holy ghost, and shake, sway, or speak uncontrollably. The presence of the holy ghost usually spreads quickly--one person begins to shout, "Hallelujah!" or "Gloria a Dios," then others respond. Then someone begins to sway or shake, and another follows. Only a handful of people actually go into these trance-states, but it is taken as evidence of the presence of the holy spirit and a sign of the efficacy of the prayer. This is the real climax of the service, and then it slowly winds down, with the music becoming softer, and the pastor handing out the offering trays to the congregation. The appearance of the holy ghost is a cathartic moment for the group. The service literally begins at a low point, with people kneeling on the ground, sobbing. By the end, their arms are raised, they are clapping and shouting, and the riotous tone of the service lifts the spirits of the congregation. The service takes about two and a half hours on a typical night.

By the time the service ends, people are exhilarated, and head home to bed along empty streets. They have a de facto exemption from the town's nighttime curfew.

Walking home after church one night, Yadira's mother asked me how I felt. I said that I felt tired. She looked concerned, and said, "You may be tired, but you should feel totally happy and at peace, because you have heard the word of God. You will sleep in peace." Her words reminded me that the church service serves a daily catharsis that alleviates tension and puts celebrants at ease.

The therapeutic efficacy of the church service rests upon the congregants' sense of guilt. The tearful prayers for forgiveness that precede the service are motivated by guilt over sinful behavior. Sin, temptation, confession, and forgiveness are the dominant themes of the service. The church has a strict code of conduct, and the failure to abide by this code produces guilt. In addition to the sins derived from the Ten Commandments that are found in all Judeo-Christian religions--greed, fornication, disrespect of elders, vengeful behavior, blasphemy, lying, and violence--Cristo Misionera prohibits drinking, wasteful spending, gambling, the wearing of jewelry, makeup, or provocative clothes, and dancing to pop music.

These codes can be carried to extremes. One afternoon, I saw Yadira in tears and asked her what was wrong. Her cousin had sent her a new skirt from New York and she was planning on wearing it to church. She showed it to some of her friends and they told her she could not wear it because it was *chinga* (sexually provocative) because its hemline fell above her knee. Yadira was certain that the skirt went below the knee, and accused her friends of trying to make her feel guilty because they were jealous of her new clothes. She was ashamed by the accusation of improper dress, and angry at her friends for their "witch-hunt" mentality. Fearing being labeled a sinner by the congregation, she sold the skirt to a neighbor who was not a church-member. Even though the skirt fell below her knee, Yadira's fear of accusations of sinful

behavior convinced her that her eyes deceived her. In this case, the women of the church were using the fear of sin as a way to enforce conformity. Yadira's skirt was sent from the US, which they saw as the source of the sinful modernity they so feared.

In various branches of the Protestant tradition, writes David Martin, "discipline and sobriety are as vigorously embraced in ordinary life as ecstasy and release are achieved in the sphere of worship." (1990:203). This emphasis on sobriety in everyday life creates guilt--behind every prohibition lies a secret craving--and this craving provokes feelings of anxiety. Temptations are signs that the devil is infiltrating one's soul, and life is seen as a constant struggle to avoid diabolical temptation. During services, the pastor asks people to publicly confess to sins. Even young children are put on the spot. The pastor will say, "Have you lied to your parents?" sticking a microphone in front of the child, who usually begins to cry. People publicly confess to both sinful acts and sinful thoughts, such as coveting another person's property or wishing them misfortune. These confessions lead to a release of tension that is built up through feelings of guilt.

In this manner, the church experience rest upon the continual production and alleviation of guilt. As Sidney Mintz has eloquently stated, "When the attainment of virtue is made possible by the foreswearing of all those things that can be turned against a man to make him feel guilty, the solution to many of life's problems can seem very clear" (Mintz 1974:261). Unlike the Catholics, the evangelicals can directly atone for their sins through prayer, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the services confirms the efficacy of their prayers. By demonstrating their ability to fight temptation, churchgoers experience a partial mastery of the self and a sense of power over their lives. The ability to fight temptation, verified by the presence of the holy



spirit, gives one a sense of power, or, at least, access to a power that can solve life's problems. The distinction between possession of power and access to power is crucial. For the Pentecostals, the holy spirit is the ultimate source of power, which acts upon individuals and groups that are able to access it through prayer.

### **The Devil Has Been Destroyed: Religion Without Guilt**

If the Cristo Misionera church created a sense of individual power or mastery through the production and alleviation of guilt, then the Creciendo en Gracia church was its opposite. It was based on the liberation of worshipers from the burdens of guilt. I first learned of the church when I saw a young man wearing a t-shirt that proclaimed, "The devil has been destroyed! We are all blessed!" The shirt was screen-printed with an image of the vanquished devil--a Halloween-style skull, placed inside a red circle bisected diagonally by a red line, as on a "No Smoking" sign. I asked him about the meaning of the shirt. "There is no more devil," he told me. "There is no more sin. *Todos somos bendecidos.*" We are all blessed.

The central tenet of the sect was that, according to the Apostle Paul, the death of Christ had freed the world from sin and believers lived in a permanent state of grace. The teachings of a Puerto Rican apostle named Juan de Jesus Miranda were the foundations of their beliefs, which derived from the doctrine, "Salvo Siempre Salvo" or "Once Saved, Always Saved." This doctrine states that once a person has been saved, he or she is bound for heaven no matter how they behave on Earth. When a person "grows in grace," they need not to worry about sin and punishment, because the crucifixion eliminated sin from the world.

The biblical evidence for this belief comes from Hebrews 2:14-15, which reads, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." (New American Standard Bible). The opposite of "death" in this passage is eternal life, entry into heaven. Members of this church believe that Jesus' death guaranteed all believers a place in heaven. Variants of this belief are common in Protestantism. The doctrine of "eternal security" was, for example, associated with the Calvinist concept of predestination, whereby a person had no power over entry to heaven or hell through their behavior in Earth. Creciendo en Gracia also believes in predestination, but it is rather tautological and risk-free version thereof, almost the exact opposite of the Calvinist vision. Membership in the church is taken as a sign of grace, and all members of the church, no matter their actions, are destined for heaven. Whereas Calvinists took the doctrine of predestination as a source of salvation anxiety that led them to do good deeds on earth, the members of this church take predestination as a free pass to heaven.

The local nickname for Creciendo en Gracia was "La Iglesia de los Asesinos"--church of the assassins--or los bendecidos (the blessed), a parodic reference to practitioners' custom of referring to each other as "bendecido/a." The founder of the town's branch of the church was a feared local thug, and a member of one of La Quebrada's most wealthy and notoriously corrupt families. The preacher allegedly murdered the previous husband of his wife in order to move into the man's home, steal his agricultural supply business, and run off with his wife, who was also the beneficiary of the victim's life insurance policy. He was known as a ruthless person who would do anything for money. The preacher founded the church in 1997, only four years after

the Puerto Rican apostle that founded CEG was supposedly visited by the Angel Gabriel and began his ministry. The founder of the La Quebrada church discovered CEG after seeing a televised sermon and visiting a branch in the city of San Pedro Sula.

Local critics saw the church as a way for the family to justify its unlawful acts--indeed, dozens of its members were part of the extended clan, employees of the family, or people linked to them through other bonds of patronage or debt. Most townspeople viewed the religion as a sham, making jokes about the *bendecidos* as *asesinos*. As one man said to me, "Isn't it convenient that the worst family here invents a religion with no sin? Now they have nothing to fear when they die. They think they're going to heaven. They can do whatever they want here on Earth without consequences," he said, pointing downward at hell with a sly wink. Despite this reputation, I met people who believed in CEG because the doctrine of individual liberation appealed to their own experiences. One man, a recovering alcoholic, liked the fact that he could no longer blame his problems on the devil. He didn't take the libertarian message as an excuse to drink, but saw it as an empowering message of personal responsibility. Three women enjoyed the fact that they could dress as they wished and didn't have to worry about a male pastor castigating them for their choice of clothing. The permissiveness of the church was attractive to these people because it gave people a sense of self-determination, despite the negative stereotype of the *bendecidos* that circulated through the town. CEG's doctrine of liberation was viewed by believers as a source of empowerment, while critics saw it as an excuse for immoral behavior. A doctrine of liberation can easily slip into absolute individualism, but it does not have to.

## **Native Critiques of Alienation: Three Examples**

One salient aspect of both the Pentecostal Iglesia Cristo Misionera and Creciendo en Gracia is that they criticize the alienated representations of power in other religions. The Pentecostals ask why Catholics bestow such power on religious icons and priests, while members of CEG ask how the Pentecostals can preach deliverance from suffering while upholding oppressive rules that produce guilt, attributing great power to the devil. In their own way, both religions are attempting to restore the power to act to individual subjects, criticizing other faiths that alienate that power.

### **Example 1: False Idols**

The Pentecostals explicitly challenge the mediation of divine power by defining themselves against Catholics. Roman Catholicism is the Honduran national religion, and the Pentecostals view it as an anachronistic form of idolatry. In interviews, Protestants consistently constantly ridiculed the Catholic faith in icons to me. Interestingly, not a single informant focused on the Catholic belief in Papal authority (unlike in Peter Cahn's ethnography of religious diversity in Chiapas, where Catholics are called *romanistas* [2003:ix]), nor did they criticize the consumption of the Eucharist. Virtually everyone mentioned idol worship as Catholicism's greatest flaw.

The strong association of Catholicism with idolatry stems from the universal importance of the image of the crucifix to Catholics. More importantly, it reflects the popularity of statues of the Virgin of Suyapa as an object of devotion for Hondurans. Suyapa, the patron saint of Honduras, is represented in tiny cedar statues, no more than three inches tall, which are found in every Honduran Catholic church, on vehicle

dashboards, and in homes and businesses. The cult of Suyapa began in the mid-eighteenth century (a Saturday in February 1747, according to legend) in a poor village outside of Tegucigalpa. Suyapa is said to have miraculously appeared to a peasant, Alejandro Colindres, and his son Jorge, when they got lost at night on their way home from work. Suyapa took the form of a tiny statue that has the power to heal the sick. She has been the national symbol of Honduras since the 1920s. The national cathedral is located in the village of Suyapa (on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa), as is a smaller shrine in which the original idol is housed. The fiesta of Nuestra Señora de Suyapa is celebrated each year as a national holiday, and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit the site to pray and seek healing. Suyapa is the symbol of Honduran Catholicism and she is strongly associated with the narrative of the Honduran nation.

The Protestants' criticism of Catholic idolatry is a challenge to the alienation of divine power. As the pastor at the Cristo Misionera church put it:

What does a crucifix or statue mean to God? We do not pray to the image of god. We pray to god in all his glory. As I like to say, you can have a cross on your chest and the devil in your head (una cruz en el pecho y el diablo en el techo)...

In contrast, the protestants emphasize their direct relationship with divinity. The Pentecostal church does not venerate religious icons or images of any kind. There is no cross image in the church, only a banner that says, "Gloria a Dios." Services are conducted in informal vernacular speech, and the sanctuary itself is non-descript. The pastor dresses neatly but informally, does not own a car, and lives a lifestyle that is similar to that of church-members. The only expensive items used in the church are large speakers and musical instruments, which project the content of the service outwards to the community, and are therefore useful expenditures used to proselytize.

All of the church's energies are devoted to speaking, singing, and shouting directly to divinity. No resources are wasted on decoration or the maintenance of a bureaucracy. The pastor is an approachable layperson who does not live extravagantly and travels through town on a bicycle.

All of this is opposite to the intimidating formality of the Catholic church, in which iconography, formal hierarchy, and even language itself stand between worshipers and divinity. The words of Don Felipe, a peasant farmer in his sixties and member of the Pentecostal Iglesia Cristo Misionero, strikingly demonstrate the difference between the "clear" (unmediated) message of the evangelicals and the Catholics:

My parents went to [Catholic] church all the time...my mother went several times a week when I was young, and I went too...and I didn't understand anything the priest said. It was all in a language called Latin. Daniel, here in Honduras, we, the poor, don't speak Latin. We speak Spanish or Castillian, as some people call it. I would sometimes ask the nuns questions about stories from the Holy Bible, but not the priest. I could look up at pictures or the statues to learn. Now, the word of God is clear. The Holy Bible tells the truth that God passed down to Jesus his son. We don't pray to statues. Listen up (*oiga bien*)! The word of God is clear for all to hear. Now everything is really clear [*clarito*].

Although Catholic priests no longer conduct mass in Latin, the local priests are foreigners who speak with accents. They only occasionally come to La Quebrada, and mass is normally given by a Guatemalan nun, accompanied by young women who live in a local convent. There are no lay Catholic preachers in La Quebrada. Worshipers must ask forgiveness by confessing to the priest, who only visits from time to time. In contrast, Don Felipe's emphasis on the clarity of the message of Pentecostalism draws attention to its relatively unmediated truth. Whereas Catholicism is formal, intimidating, and external to the local community, Pentecostalism is informal, accessible, and local.

Taken together, the Pentecostal rejection of priestly authority, faith in icons, and linguistic conventions are all challenges to the mediation of power. The Pentecostals emphasize clarity and direct communication with divinity that gives the worshiper direct access to divine power. They can see the results of their faith in the appearance of the holy ghost, revealed through speech in tongues and trances. The ultimate source of power is still transcendent, but worshipers can mediate between the transcendent and the mundane without the help of a priest or an icon. Through personal discipline and ecstatic worship, people attain the power to mediate between the sacred and profane worlds.

### **Example 2: False Doctrines**

Whereas the Pentecostal church relies on a relatively unmediated relationship of holiness, Creciendo en Gracia relies on posters, recorded music, broadcast sermons, t-shirts, and webcasts to spread its message. In almost every way, Creciendo en Gracia embraces affect, glitz, and indulgence. During services, sultry young singers in provocative costumes sing to the latest hip-hop beats. Worshipers watch recorded music videos and view sermons on the internet. A modified seal of the President of the United States of America (Figure 4) is the congregation's symbol. Note the small "SSS" written on the upper right corner of the shield, which stands for "Salvo Siempre Salvo" (Once Saved, Always Saved).

As mentioned above, the church emphasizes its opposition to both Catholic and Pentecostal Baptist concepts of guilt and self-denial, celebrating the fact that women can dress as they wish and wear makeup. Dancing, stylish

clothing, makeup, and alcohol are permitted, and even celebrated. Consider the poster reproduced in Figure 5: Here, the woman in the center of the frame is carrying a bible and wearing a long skirt of the type favored by the Pentecostal Baptists, called "Ropa Cristiana" (Christian Clothes). She dreams of wearing pants, short hair, and stylish clothes while she proclaims the holiness of Jehova. She is also chained to a vicious guard-dog called "commandments," while lit sticks of dynamite called "law" threaten to explode. To her right is a kneeling, pathetic-looking man, chained to the shadowy "untouchables," the world religious councils, who warn him, "Remember, we forgive, but we never forget," while holding a scythe and an axe.

This poster depicts people imprisoned by religious doctrine, then set free by the more permissive faith provided by CEG. Traditional religion is depicted as oppressive and dangerous. In the upper right hand corner, there is a sandwich formed by "Paul" and "Jose Luis" as bread, with "Moses" as the meat in the middle. Jose Luis, the apostle, considers himself to be continuing the work of Paul, freeing the world from the religious law of Moses, replacing the Pentecostal laws with a doctrine of permissive grace.

CEG's message of individual liberation is, in some ways, a message of "un-alienated" power. However CEG's doctrine is rooted in the absolute authority of the Apostle Jose. He determines right from wrong, and individual liberation does not include the freedom to question the apostle. Although the effect of his ministry is to give worshipers a sense of agency and free will, in direct opposition to the strict Pentecostals, worshipers follow his every command and utterance.





Figure 4: Official Seal of Creciendo en Gracia



Figure 5: Cartoon from Creciendo en Gracia's website  
 (<http://www.creciendoengracia.com/posterdelareforma/poster1a.jpg>)

The Apostle José Luís carries the message of god. God, through the Angel Gabriel, communicated the Gospel to him, and he carries it to the people. This point is made clear in the following letter that was posted on the CEG website. It specifically contrasts the false doctrines of Pentecostalism with the apostolic message of CEG:

Dear Brothers of CEG:

One of the articles posted on your website got my attention. In the final part, it reads: Dear Brother, the power of the Holy Spirit did not arrive in Pentecost, but rather, God communicates the gospel through our Apostle Jose Luis de Jesús Miranda and upon hearing it and believing in him, we are stamped with the Holy Spirit ...I would like you to explain this segment to me because it really surprised me.

The Apostle responded as follows:

For two thousand years, religion has thought that the Holy Spirit arrived in Pentecost, but nevertheless, no one discovered anything there. There were some mystical manifestations of trembling and unknown languages, but there wasn't any discovery....

Nobody in more than twenty centuries has been able to discover these truths until the edification of the Apostle José Luis De Jesús Miranda arrived. Now, through him, the believers are stamped with the Holy Spirit, upon hearing the authentic gospel of Christ resuscitated in his words.

As this exchange makes clear, hearing and seeing the apostle speak the gospel provided a religious experience. The CEG services were not designed to access divine power directly. The apostle received the truth from the Angel Gabriel, and he spread the word to the congregation. For this reason, viewing a sermon over the internet or a satellite feed was just as effective as participating in a church service. Being a spectator was a religious experience in itself. The poster reproduced below provides another example of the Apostle's ability to mediate between god and humanity, and

the importance of new media technologies to CEG's message. In this image, the Apostle holds out a bible (presumably interpreting it), speaking into a microphone. Above him, a satellite orbits the earth, and the words "We are living in the days of the mediator, Jesus Christ, man" are printed in between outer space and the apostle, just under the satellite.<sup>67</sup> The satellite, which mediates between earth and sky, is analogous to the apostle, who mediates the word of god for humanity. This poster, coupled with CEG's heavy reliance on satellite feeds and internet sermons, draws attention--indeed, celebrates--the highly mediated nature of its religious message.

Pentecostals were the "target audience" for CEG. CEG defined itself in opposition to the Pentecostals, and their apostle is a converted Puerto Rican Pentecostal. The Apostle contrasts his own revelation to that described in the biblical story of Pentecost (Acts II), in which the Prophet Joel delivers the message that speech in tongues is a sign of salvation. Jose de Jesus says that this story contains "mystical manifestations of trembling and unknown languages, but there wasn't any discovery." In contrast, he received a version of the gospel that presents the possibility of a new life of freedom and "grace" to Pentecostals who, like the figures in the poster above, are imprisoned by strict doctrines.

The Pentecostals define themselves against the Catholics, and preach the unmediated relationship between people and the Holy Spirit. *Creciendo en Gracia* defines itself against the Pentecostals, believing that that the rigid codes of conduct force the Pentecostals to live in a state of rule-bound paralysis. The Pentecostals' attribution of power to the devil limits their own autonomy, and CEG offers an alternative that gives

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<sup>67</sup> Also, the poster calls Honduras, "Alturas." This is a favorite joke that the apostle often makes when he references Honduras. The word "Honduras" means "depths," and the apostle calls it *Alturas* (heights), due to the rapid growth of CEG in the country.



Figure 6: Creciendo en Gracia Convention Poster, 2005

individuals control over their lives. In this sense, Pentecostalism is to Catholicism as CEG is to Pentecostalism. Each doctrine places progressively more emphasis on individual liberty.

Both religions present worshipers with the possibility for a "closer" relationship to the true source of power.

### **Native Materialism**

Logically, one would ask why Creciendo en Gracia would need to believe in the Apostle at all. Why not dispense with religion altogether and take the doctrine of liberation to its conclusion? Why ascribe power to anything beyond the individual? This line of reasoning echoes the most polemical Marxist interpretations of religion that divide the world into "true" material forces and "false" (or, at least, secondary) symbolic representations. Interestingly, a local theater group in La Quebrada produced a short play that parallels this interpretation, criticizing the ideological effects of religious belief and emphasizing a masculine form of materiality.<sup>68</sup> Before I conclude this discussion, I will summarize the plot of the skit, called "Los Santos Comilónes" (The Gluttonous Saints):

An old woman, dressed in traditional peasant garb, is at work cooking in a rustic *comedor* (diner), its walls lined with religious icons and statues (held by actors). A

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<sup>68</sup> The theater group is comprised of local men with no formal training. Most have the equivalent of a high-school diploma, but none have attended college. They perform unscripted short plays at local events, schools, and festivals. I did not see this skit performed in person. It was recounted to me by one of the actors, who described the plot, and showed me photos and a poor-quality video tape of the performance.

tall *gringo* (mildly insulting slang for American), sunburned, wearing sandals, shorts, and a tank-top, enters the building. A few seconds later, a flamboyant transvestite enters as well, wearing a bright purple skirt, a long-haired wig and gaudy make-up. The gringo and the transvestite begin to talk to one another, and order their food, making a lot of noise and generally being rude. The old woman smiles and seems happy just to have customers, despite their rude behavior. The gringo and the transvestite begin to read a newspaper together as they await their meals. They laugh and the transvestite flirts with the gringo. The old woman delivers their food, but they continue to be absorbed in the newspaper and their flirting. As they read the newspaper and flirt, the saint statues descend from the walls and eat their meals off their plates. The statues also eat the rest of the food the old woman is preparing in the kitchen. The old woman, the transvestite, and the gringo remain oblivious. The play ends as the woman and the customers react with great surprise and anger that someone has eaten their food. The "gluttonous" saints have returned to the walls, and the audience erupts in laughter.

This skit could be interpreted as a political commentary, but it was not intended as such. Themes of gender and religion are more important. All of the actors in the play were young men, including the ones who portrayed the transvestite and the old woman. Acting is not considered to be a masculine activity, and some of the actors were accused of being homosexuals. They played the characters in over-the-top comedic styles to distance the behavior of the characters from their own personas. The gringo--dressed like a slob in shorts, sandals, and a tank top--and the transvestite represent the inverse of ideal Honduran masculinity. These men are long-haired, effeminate, messily dressed, and rude. The old woman doesn't seem bothered by them, because she wants their business and is protected by the saint statues. The

transvestite, the gringo, and the *anciana* are all distracted--the two men by their interest in the shared newspaper and the old lady by her belief that the saints will protect her business. The men's attention to the newspaper parallels the woman's faith in the saints.

The written word and the statues of the saints represent forms of authority--the first being associated with the modern intellectual power of the gringo and the latter with the traditional religious power of Catholicism. Both are opposed to the physicality of the young men. Hence, the gringo is associated with the transvestite. They sit together and flirt. The newspaper draws the attention of the gringo and transvestite away from their food. The saints' theft of food is a critique of the efficacy of words and icons and an affirmation of materiality, which is associated with males. The newspaper readers are effeminate buffoons, implicitly contrasted with the young male actors who portray them. Honduran men are present only as the critical authors and performers of the skit. The actors are saying that the transvestite, the gringo, and the old woman are too caught in their respective forms of false consciousness to notice that they are being robbed of the substance of life (food) by their belief in media. The symbolic (words and icons) is associated with a benighted, somewhat benign, femininity while the material (the production of food) is associated with masculine physicality.

The message of this skit bears much in common with the extreme materialist view of religion as mystification, an interpretation that Marxian anthropologists have long struggled to overcome. This view separates social reality into a "base" of relations of material production that determines symbolic representations and social consciousness. These representations ultimately reinforce the dominant relations of



production, "mystifying" dominated classes so that they accept the terms of domination as the way of the world.

One virtue of this theory is that it links collective representations with social relations and emphasizes the fact that religious beliefs can have ideological effects. However, this theory understands society primarily as a system of material production, rather than one that also produces values, beliefs, and collective representations that are *equally* important to the organization of social life and not secondary to material production. The interplay between religious doctrines in La Quebrada shows that the desire for a sense of power is not only about materiality, but about the ability to give meaning to social reality. In times of great doubt, the experience of individual power provides religious believers with a comforting certitude. Both the Pentecostal church and CEG provide adherents with a sense of power and control over their lives. For the Pentecostals, this power comes from the ability to access a transcendent Holy Spirit. Members of CEG are empowered by the liberating doctrine of the Apostle José.

### **Analysis of Religious Concepts of Power**

Here, I will employ three theoretical concepts--*charisma*, *mediation*, and *alienation*--to describe the relationship between the representation or perception of religious power by believers and its ultimate source in social processes. Each is important to an understanding of why religions of "self-help" tend to externalize the source of power while simultaneously believing in the power of the individual to act.

In his classic essay on the origins of religious authority, Max Weber wrote that in that times of social, political, or economic distress, "natural leaders...have been holders of

specific gifts of the body and the spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody" (Weber 1946:245). His concept of *charisma* was based on the idea that the most fundamental form of religious power is the ability to perform miraculous acts--"specific gifts of the body and spirit." Charismatic power is wild, transcendent, and unstructured. It is directly opposed to any social hierarchy, and is rooted in the capacities of a specific individual who is able to transcend the dominant social order. In periods of perceived crisis, when the social order is in question, people whose power is not determined by position within power structures become appealing leaders. Individual unstructured power is the basis of charismatic authority. For Weber, all religion begins with charismatic power, which becomes routinized when it is turned into religious doctrine with accompanying formal hierarchies.

Charisma is only given meaning when it is witnessed and communicated by a social group. Recently, Jacques Derrida (2001) has argued that Christianity rests upon a uniquely mediated religious experience of charisma.<sup>69</sup> *Mediation*, in this context, is experience that is perceived by an audience through the prism of religious icons, priests, televised services, photographs and, perhaps, language itself. In contrast, unmediated belief is based on a direct experience of divinity. Unlike Judaism and Islam, Christianity rests upon knowledge of divinity through a "third"--Jesus Christ. Derrida argues that Christianity is uniquely dependent on mediation--the communication of religious experience through symbols--rather than direct experience.

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<sup>69</sup> Jacques Derrida 2001 "Above All, No Journalists!" in *Religion and Media*, Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 56-93.

In this text, Derrida makes a broader point about the relationship between televisual media and religion that is beyond the scope of this discussion. His key point is that in periods of doubt, social bonds must be reconstructed on the basis of mutually recognized faith. In the absence of collective ideologies that seem to "fit" reality, people look for direct sensory experiences that establish certitude. When belief in a specific ideology or doctrine is in doubt, faith can only be re-established by experiencing the "truth" of religion. For Christians, this involves bearing witness to miracles as a spectator. The "truth" of religious power is established through a performance. On American televangelists, he writes:

To return to those American sessions of miracles on the set, one sees there a very elegant person who speaks well, a star of the stage. He comes and all of a sudden he makes ten persons rise, fall, get up again, falling and rising at the very instant he touches them, or even looks at them. There is no need to believe; one believes; no effort is necessary because no doubt is possible. Like the ten thousand persons in the auditorium, one is confronted with the thing itself.

This is the argumentative strategy that is actually used in all the milieus of proselytism, of conversion...It bets...on the fiduciary structure that enjoins that in any case faith is irreducible, that there is no society without appeal to faith, without "believe me, I am telling you the truth, believe me!"...certitude is there, in the immediacy of the senses. (Derrida 2001:64)

Christian proselytizers "prove" the validity of their faith by performing magical acts. *Certitude is there, in the immediacy of the senses.* This certitude is therapeutic in times of great doubt. According to Derrida, Christians witness miracles performed by another person rather than by directly reciting prayers (as in Judaism or Islam). The spectators experience the miracles of the evangelist *qua* medium. The mediated nature of evangelical Christianity makes it especially well-suited to television.

Putting aside the question of whether the mediation of religious experience is unique to Christianity, Derrida's argument emphasizes that charisma attains meaning in mediated form, but the process of mediation is elided or hidden behind the appearance of directness. The shortcoming of this argument is that it fails to account for the fact that charismatic power is often directly experienced by afflicted people during healing rituals and trances. As Csordas (2002) has emphasized, religious belief is often grounded in bodily experience rather than acts of witnessing. In these cases, the worshiper feels that he or she can directly access transcendent power. Derrida would likely argue that the experience of directness obscures the medium of the healer, but Pentecostals consistently believe that the holy ghost directly touches them and heals bodily afflictions. The healer may be present, but the act is experienced as the direct intervention of divinity.

The third relevant concept is *alienation*. This word is the English translation of the German word *entfremdung* first used by Hegel to describe the separation of God (Spirit) from people and nature. For Hegel, the entire process of human history moved towards overcoming the alienation of Spirit, ending in the self-conscious recognition of the world as Spirit. Feuerbach presented a humanistic reinterpretation of Hegel's idealist version of alienation, arguing in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) that gods were alienated representations of humans, and that divine power was alienated human power. Marx then expanded and critiqued Feuerbach's concept of alienation, arguing that the latter's concept of humanity was itself alienated from actual sociohistorical processes. Marx's concept of alienated labor under capitalism is his most famous use of the term, but his critique of Feuerbach's materialism was more general. He argued that Feuerbach failed to see that human social life consisted of various institutions

(such as the family, the state, and the market) that were social products understood as being natural, and therefore external to society. He agreed with Feuerbach that religious objects were alienated representations of humanity, but he argued that Feuerbach did not understand that his concept of humanity was historically-determined, itself a product of various escalating levels of alienation.

Within the anthropology of religion, Steven Sangren (1991, 1993, 2000) has employed the concept of alienation to describe how venerated collective representations disguise the individual and/or social origins of power. Sangren's theory combines Durkheimian notions of the relationship between the sacred and the social with a Marxian emphasis on society as the product of individual activity. On the one hand is the Durkheimian emphasis on the sacred as a representation of the power of the collectivity: "society imagines itself in representations of transcendence" (Sangren 1993:577 n.4). On the other hand is the Marxian idea that these representations are alienated images of the creative power of the individual subject. Despite the incorporation of Marxian and Durkheimian concepts of sociality, Sangren's theory of alienation is quite similar to Feuerbach's original formulation. Individuals imagine their own power as an external force that governs their lives. Sangren writes:

[Divine] intervention is typically constructed around those events or crises that would seem most threatening to the boundaries or viability of the self (for example, illness, family, tensions, and career or school problems). Worship thus employs and helps to produce an alienated representation of the subject's own powers of self-production and self-transformation; by engaging divinity, the subject in reality produces a consciousness of him-herself *as* a subject with powers to act, but in the process also produces an alienated representation by attributing this creative power to the god. (Sangren 1993:569)

Compare this to the first chapter of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*:

Thus, man becomes conscious of himself through the object that reflects his being; man's self-consciousness is his consciousness of the object... What man calls Absolute Being, his God, is his own being. The power of the object over him is therefore the power of his own being. Thus, the power of the object of feeling is the power of feeling itself... (Feuerbach 1843:2).

This theory of religious power is especially relevant to proselytizing religions that explicitly believe in the power of faith to resolve life's problems. The fact that proselytization is so-often based upon access to miraculous power suggests that the people are drawn to faiths that present them with the power to assert greater control over their lives. They experience this power in *relatively* unalienated form, because it is not mediated by priests, icons, or formal church rituals, and this is part of its appeal.

In La Quebrada, the new churches emphasize what Sangren calls the "subject's own powers of self-production" in totally different ways. Taken to its logical conclusion, the idea that relatively "un-alienated" religions emphasize individuals' power to determine the course of their own lives suggests a libertarian philosophy that runs the risk of becoming a doctrine of absolute autonomy. As the interplay between ascetic and libertarian faiths in La Quebrada suggests, the way that religions conceptualize this very problem can contribute to an anthropological understanding of the relationship between religious power and sociopolitical processes. The challenge of an anthropological concept of alienation is to understand why collective representations take *specific* alienated forms in different cultural situations. The fact that both the Pentecostals and members of CEG conceive of divinity as the power to improve the lives of individuals reflects a desire for solutions to social crisis that are based upon individual acts.

## **Conclusion: Evangelical Religion and Postmodernity**

Placed in historical context, these representations of power fit well with contemporary social reality. As a point of comparison, I began this chapter with a description of the popular religious movements that developed during the era of modernization and agrarian reform in the sixties and seventies. Robert White (1977) argued that the secularization of Honduran society, and specifically the rise of modern, national political parties in the mid-twentieth century, changed the nature of religious practice. Various religions embraced "popular empowerment," understood as the expanding involvement in a broad coalition of classes to reform society for the collective good. Reformist groups promoted co-operative agricultural production and land reform, while radical groups focused on overcoming economic dependency and class inequality, leading land-seizures and projects that "brought the peasantry to consciousness." Despite their philosophical differences, these populist movements envisioned power within the sphere of national society. In the reformist case, Catholic leaders stressed the need for a democratic class compromise to be achieved through agricultural modernization and land reform. In the radical case, they stressed the power of the *campesino* class that would be led by a revolutionary vanguard, taking violent action in order to be liberated. The key similarity is that both the reformist and radical versions of Christian Social Movements had some over-arching vision of "society." In contrast, the contemporary religious movements ignore "society" and focus exclusively on individual power, however conceived. For this reason, I have called them post-modern.

"Traditional" Honduran Catholicism placed great emphasis on the power of certain patron saints that protected a specific community. These saints, represented in carved

wooden statues or icons, were collectively worshiped during annual communal feasts that guaranteed divine protection while cementing social bonds between different sectors of a community. The integrative function of saints' feasts has been well-documented in the ethnographic literature on Mesoamerica (e.g. Cancian 1965). The collective power of local communities was embodied in the saints and worshiped each year, and the religious fiestas functioned to redistribute wealth and bring various sectors of the community together. The specific representation of power was based on a localized vision of the social whole.

As the modern state developed, the Virgin of Suyapa became the symbol of the Honduran nation, replicating the relationship between saint and community at a national level. Fittingly, the shrine of Suyapa was on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, the city that became the country's political capital after independence. The Catholic clerical elites remained in the country's colonial capital, Comayagua, while the new secular center of the country was constructed around mining concerns in Tegucigalpa. It was no coincidence that the "miracle of Suyapa" happened to occur on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa at the same time (late eighteenth century) that new national elites were wresting power from the colonial aristocracy in Comayagua. The story of Suyapa allowed the post-independence leaders to shift the country's symbolic center away from Comayagua and to the new capital of Tegucigalpa. Throughout the modern history of Honduras, the symbolic expression of religious power has tended to follow patterns in the development of the nation-state.

As the role of secular government expanded, political parties replaced territorial communities as the basic unit of social affiliation, and secular, diachronic visions of progress guided sociopolitical life. Religion, of course, remained an important part of



everyday life, but the state clearly surpassed the church as the fundamental social institution in all but the most isolated parts of the country.

Through the sixties, popular religious movements followed the basic fault-lines of secular politics--Democratic modernization theory and Marxism. By the eighties, "popular Christianity" slowly withered away, alongside popular politics in general. Evangelical Christianity developed in its wake, assisted by the US/Honduran military alliance, which feared any form of populist politics in the countryside. To repeat the key question that guided this essay: Why has evangelical religion remained such a vibrant and popular force in rural Honduras into the twenty-first century, even after the end of the violence?

I believe that the answer lies on the way that these religions formulate power, and its fit with contemporary Honduran politics. By viewing individual choice as the source of social problems and their potential solution, these religions translate the ideology of economic postmodernity into the religious sphere. There is no notion of "the popular" or "the social," beyond the immediate kin-group and the local church. Secular political debates have been replaced by a focus on depoliticized individual morality. At a time where the Honduran state has given up on agrarian reform, and the logic of market competition has replaced any overarching vision of collective progress, this individualized concept of power reflects secular changes in the relationship between nation and state. Just as "modern" political theories were reflected in popular religious movements in the sixties and seventies, "postmodern" theories now have a religious counterpart in the evangelical movements.

Therefore, the key theoretical question is not whether these religious representations of power are alienated or not, but how these particular representations ideologically

reproduce the dominant vision of society. In this case, the historically-specific form of religious symbolism is clearly related to the absence of a guiding political project for rural Hondurans and the severance of the pact between state and nation. Both the sober, morally-upright Pentecostals and the libidinous, libertarians of CEG, view themselves as iconoclasts. Their respective faiths restore the power to act to individuals, abstracted from any wider totality.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Justice at a Price: Fair Trade and the Apotheosis of Market Rationality**

At this point, I will return to the subject of coffee, which was the reason I started working in La Quebrada in the first place. As I mentioned in the Introduction, my focus is "fair trade" coffee, which I believe to be a quintessential postmodern social movement, for reasons I will make clear. "Fair trade" is analogous to evangelical religion because it rests upon a notion of "social justice" that views individual choice as the basic engine of social reform. Both movements have developed since 1989, and have become increasingly popular in the nineties. Like evangelical religion, fair trade's recent popularity derives from its depoliticized message of individual choice. In this case, coffee consumers are able to reform society by making individual moral decisions. Fair trade rests upon a theory of society in which states play no role in mediating between the global market and national society, and individual consumers develop and enforce normative standards of justice.

This subject requires a change in the format of the argument. For one thing, fair trade involves both coffee consumers in the developed world and coffee farmers in Honduras. Although the ethnographic component of this chapter is based on research in Honduras, it is necessary to explain fair trade's intellectual, cultural, and historical origins before delving into the specifics of coffee production in La Quebrada. I have begun previous chapters with ethnographic descriptions that led to theoretical conclusions. Here, I will begin with a theoretical discussion that shifts the discussion away from the specific case of Honduras. Over the course of the argument, I will

present ethnographic information about coffee production in La Quebrada within a discussion of theories of capitalism and social justice. Because "fair trade" seeks to integrate capitalist exchange with contemporary concepts of economic justice, it is necessary to begin with a summary of how classic social theory has framed the relationship between the market and morality, and then explain how these modern theoretical visions relate to fair trade's postmodern concept of social justice.

## **Part I. Is Fair Trade Possible? Capitalism and Social Justice**

The possibility of creating equitable social institutions within capitalist economies has been a central problem in modern social theory. In the modern theoretical tradition of Weber, Durkheim, and Marx, the capitalist economy has long been treated as fundamentally incompatible with what Weber called the "ethic of brotherliness."<sup>70</sup> All three theorists believed that the ethical requirements of capitalism (impersonal rules, competition, and calculation) clashed with the requirements of collective social life. The central crisis of modernity lay in the social disintegration, class conflict, alienation, and anomie brought about by the rise of industrial capitalism and bureaucracy.

These thinkers sought to explain the radical cultural shifts that followed the Industrial Revolution in Europe, focusing on the rise of capitalist modernity in relation to

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<sup>70</sup> Dated language aside, we may safely assume that "brotherliness" applies to women as well, since the word was intended to refer to generalized human compassion. My discussion of Weber draws greatly from Robert Bellah, "Max Weber and World-Denying Love: A Look at the Historical Sociology of Religion" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, June 1999, Vol. 67, No. 2, pp. 277-304.

previous world-historical epochs. Each one focused on some form of social decay brought about by the Industrial Revolution: Marx felt that the rise of capitalism led to individual alienation and class polarization; for Weber, capitalism brought the rationalization of social life through bureaucratization; and for Durkheim, the rise of capitalism led to the breakdown of social cohesion, which was manifested in individual anomie caused by an increasingly fragmented and complex division of labor, which caused people to lose touch with their place within a collectivity. All three theorists shared a common concern for how best to resolve the tension between capitalist competition and the public good. They sought to understand how the incredible productive forces brought about by capitalism might lead to a more equitable, egalitarian society.

Of the three thinkers, Max Weber was the most pessimistic about the possibility of resolving the crisis of capitalist modernity. Although he clearly and brilliantly identified the crisis, he saw no way out of it. Industry, technology, and bureaucracy were here to stay, and he saw no reformist or revolutionary platform that might make capitalism more equitable in the future. In Weber's words, "The more the world of the modern capitalist economy follows its own immanent laws, the less accessible it is to any imaginable relation with a religious ethic of brotherliness" (Weber 1958:331). For Weber, the value-spheres (*wertsphären*) of the market and religion were oriented towards completely different types of action, the former towards impersonality and rational individual maximization, and the latter towards human compassion and morality. Market logic was inherently dispassionate--based on abstract principles--and moral logic was inherently compassionate, based on human "brotherhood," the affective bonds formed between members of a community. For Weber, modern formal rationality was unique in that it relied upon universal abstract laws, which, in

pure ideal-typical form, were completely impersonal and therefore contrary to the "ethic of brotherliness." Modern social relationships were governed by impersonal legal contracts rather than affective principles of personal status (an idea first developed by Henry Maine in *Ancient Law* [1959].)

Economic rationality denied the ethic of brotherliness, and there was no way out of this trap. In Robert Bellah's words, modernity was characterized by "the increasingly irreconcilable conflict between [value-spheres], a differentiation which leads to the 'polytheism' of modernity, a 'war of the gods,' which is the result of the entire process of rationalization, Weber's central preoccupation during his last and most fruitful period" (Bellah 1999:277). The war of modernity pitted the god of the market versus the god of love, and the market was winning the war.

Bellah argues that the essay "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions" is "perhaps the key text in explaining Weber's entire corpus" (Bellah 1999:277).

Weber's bleak view of humanity's future as an "iron casing" came from his belief that the ethic of capitalist competition would progressively destroy the ethic of brotherliness, which, to some degree, had organized all pre-capitalist societies.<sup>71</sup> This ethic gradually lost its relative importance as humanity moved towards rational modernity. The future would hold an impersonal, unfeeling world in which the cold objectivity of calculative rationality would dissolve the personal bonds between people, the social contract voided by the laws of the market.

Rationalization was, for Weber, based on politics that had become depersonalized via bureaucracy and written law, an economy which was depersonalized through the use of money, and a religious morality which was depersonalized through belief in sacred

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<sup>71</sup> Here, I follow Eric Wolf's suggestion that the standard translation, "iron cage," is incorrect (Wolf 1999:41)

texts that applied laws to all people. In all three cases, abstract logic replaced personalistic bonds. Following Sir Henry Maine, Weber argues that "the sib" or the kin-group is the historical basis of all social identification. He believed that society developed from simple forms to more complex ones, but he did not have an evaluative evolutionary position. That is, modern complex societies were not "higher" than simple ones, but they did develop from more simple forms. Historical sociology could determine how existing sociocultural forms emerged dialectically from previous ones.

Weber, like Durkheim, argued that individuals in small-scale societies have reciprocal obligations to the kin group, which are legitimated through ritual. People become conscious of their place in a social collectivity through ritual practice and more mundane forms of reciprocal action. As cities began to develop during the so-called Axial Age, salvation religions replaced kinship ties with ties of faith to an abstract "brotherhood" of believers. Such an allegiance required a person to renounce "organic" ties to the immediate kin group in the name of the bonds of faith and symbolic brotherhood, usually established through belief in a religious text.

The "world religions"--Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism--gave ultimate value to abstract "acosmistic" love, which is a concern for all people, regardless of language, nationality, or social position. Such a belief requires one to behave in ways that may conflict with the interests of the immediate kin-group in the name of religious creed. A person's allegiance expands beyond the boundaries of the "sib," because it is based on faith in a religious text which applies to *all* believers. This requires an inherently *abstract* concept of the social totality.

For Weber, the central problem of modernity was that nationalism had become the most important form of collective social identity, and that nationalism served the

interests of bellicose states that strove for power and rarely acted in the interest of the nation. Rhetoric aside, states were only concerned with the expansion of their own power. During Weber's lifetime, the modern welfare state began to rein in "pure" competitive capitalism in the name of the public good by enforcing labor laws and using taxes to benefit the citizenry as a whole (education, health care, recreation, arts, etc). Germany, for example, developed the world's first social security system in 1889. But Weber was cynical about the welfare state. Weber saw the measures of the welfare state as coercive policies designed to enhance state power, which were ideologically disguised as disinterested ethics. He wrote, "In the final analysis, in spite of all 'social welfare policies,' the whole course of the state's inner political functions, of justice and administration, is repeatedly and unavoidably regulated by the objective pragmatism of 'reasons of state'" (Weber 1958:334). He drew an analogy between bureaucratic law and money--both created an abstract, impersonal system. He writes, "...the political man acts just like the economic man, in a manner of fact manner 'without regard to the person'...without hate and therefore without love" (1958:334). Weber's pessimistic attitude towards the welfare state demonstrates his general pessimism towards the future of capitalist society.

Weber's work has clear parallels with Durkheimian sociology, although Durkheim had much greater faith in society's ability to manage capitalism for the greater good. Durkheim argued that all concepts of morality were based on an individual's awareness of his or her place within a social collectivity. Moral concepts formed the basis of all religious thought, which was a predecessor of scientific thought. Science and religion were abstract ways of explaining the world that recognized human collectivities as governed by forces that reached beyond individuals. The human faculty for abstract reasoning was a product of social relations, and universal logic



required a universal concept of humanity to which such logic would apply. Unlike Weber, Durkheim saw the trend towards more abstract and expansive understandings of society as a positive development. In the conclusion to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he writes that,

There is no people, and no State, that is not engaged with a more or less undelimited society that includes all people and all States with which it is indirectly or directly in contact; there is no national life that is not under the sway of an international collective life. The more we advance in history, the larger and the more important these international groupings become" (428).

He continues,

As that international life broadens, so too does the collective horizon; society no longer appears as the whole, par excellence, and becomes part of a whole that is more vast, with frontiers that are indefinite and capable of rolling back indefinitely. As a result, things can no longer fit within the social frames where they were originally classified; they must be organized with principles of their own" (446)

The great challenge of modernity was to develop legitimate social institutions to integrate an ever-expanding complex society. Durkheim believed that social science could contribute to the development of a political institution that would rise above national interests and class struggle, and his sentiments at the end of *The Elementary Forms*, written on the brink of World War I, presage the idea of "world government" that would grow out of that war and lead to the establishment of the United Nations. For him, modern states had the potential to act in the interests of society, but only if it was guided by positivist social science.

Durkheim did not directly discuss the rationalization of economic life, but his nephew Marcel Mauss applied his theories of social life to economics. The concept of the

capitalist market as impersonal vis á vis non-capitalist economic systems is famously argued Mauss in *The Gift*, which argues that non-capitalist gift economies are based on the establishment of social bonds through exchange. In non-capitalist economies, material objects are always associated with their creators and recipients, and value is only realized through the social distribution of objects. There is no abstract, impersonal measure of value to establish equivalency between all objects. Value cannot be separated from individual people.

The impersonality of capitalist exchange is a central element of Marx's definition of commodities as well. Marx defined commodities as representing a specific quantity of *abstract* (and therefore impersonal) social labor. The universal exchangeability of goods requires a quantifiable abstract measure of value, symbolically expressed in a specific quantity of money. Similarly, Weber writes that "money is the most abstract and 'impersonal' medium which exists in human life" (331). Money, as a symbolic expression of a specific quantity of abstract labor, allows capitalism to function as a rational system, because, through the symbolic medium of money, value can be objectively quantified according to universal standards.

Despite the vast theoretical differences between Weberian sociology, the *Année Sociologique*, and Marxian theory, all three approaches agreed that an abstract, impersonal standard of value was a defining characteristic of the capitalist economy. When value is expressed in abstract terms, the human (i.e. personal) element of market behavior falls to the background, or, in Weber's more bleak predictions, disappears completely. Mauss recognized that the personal element of exchange still existed in the practice of luxury expenditures, gift-giving and reciprocity, but bemoaned the facelessness that had come to define the artificially separated "economic sphere" of modern capitalism.

In the past two decades, universal or global social movements have expanded the ethic of brotherliness beyond the boundaries of nation-states, adapting the religious ideal of universal brotherhood to *secular* international politics. Secular concepts of universal human rights and global standards of fairness have transcended individual countries or regions in the name of social justice. These universal concepts of morality existed in the past within the religious sphere, but only recently have the so-called global New Social Movements developed a secular, transnational moral platform. Jurgen Habermas is the most important theorist of this philosophy of justice, and he has generally espoused a form of politics that creates the conditions for rational communication between social groups. One consequence of Habermas' theory of the "transformation of the public sphere," (1989) has been renewed attention given to public participation in politics. However, the ideal Habermasian public sphere develops outside of the institutional confines of the nation-state.

"Fair trade" is one of the most well-known examples of this transnational secular concept of social justice. It is a form of international market exchange that combines normative concepts of fairness with liberal economics. "Fair trade" is a process that certifies and labels commodities, notably coffee, that are produced under "fair" conditions, as determined and enforced by a non-governmental auditing body, the International Fairtrade Labeling Organization (IFLO). In general, "fair" certification guarantees that farmers have been paid a minimum price of \$1.29 per pound of coffee and that workers are treated fairly on farms. Fair trade producers must fit into country-specific definitions of "small farmers" developed by the IFLO. "Fair trade" explicitly presents itself as an alternative to agro-industrial food production and is marketed towards urbanites who can afford to pay between ten and thirteen dollars for

a pound of coffee. With the addition of a "fair trade certified" label, "fairness" becomes an attribute of the commodity, similar to its country of origin, flavor characteristics, or caffeine content. Under fair trade, consumers enforce labor standards outside the boundaries of any national political system, using market choice rather than legal means. In its rhetoric, fair trade rests upon affective bonds between producers and consumers in international commodities markets. The question is: Is this possible? Can international consumers develop and enforce a standard of fairness outside of political institutions?

Scholars who have written about fair trade, such as Renard (1993) Raynolds (2000, 2004), and Barham (2002) tend to see it as a corrective to contemporary free-market economics that "re-embeds" commodity exchange in concrete social relations. I believe that fair trade in fact represents the apotheosis of calculative rationality masquerading as moral sentiment. By comparing fair trade with consumer boycotts and national trade policies, in Part I of this chapter I argue that fair trade places the responsibility for the maintenance of justice upon individual consumers and thus represents the epitome of market-driven thought. Under fair trade, justice is quantified into the terms of money. Fair trade assigns a cash value to morality and sociality, synthesizing the two incompatible value-spheres of market and religion, objectivity and affect, as originally conceived by Max Weber.

Though ideologically concerned with social justice and the well-being of commodity producers in the developing world, fair trade actually plays into the hand of the very process it seeks to redress. By incorporating morality into the exchange value of a commodity, "fair trade" reinforces the terms of pure calculative rationality by

expressing fairness in terms of exchange value. In this sense, it epitomizes what I have called post-modern theories of social justice.

In Part II of this chapter, I use ethnographic material from Honduras to argue that fair trade is based upon a mythic construction of the global marketplace that has ideological effects. Fair trade simplifies the terms of participation for various stakeholders in the coffee market, and provides a rather myopic version of the relationship between coffee producers and consumers that fails to grasp the productive system at its highest levels. Although fair trade claims to create a direct relationship between commodity producers and consumers, it is a highly mediated relationship that does not accurately represent the complexities of the coffee trade. By shifting the responsibility for the maintenance of social justice from states and citizens to individual consumers, fair trade is essentially a private act. Fair trade's conception of social justice is unfortunately hindered by its emphasis on private action.

## **Part II. Contemporary Social Justice in Historical Perspective**

What a difference a century makes. In the early twentieth century, a consumer movement called "fair trade" emerged among urbanites in the United States. It was intended to challenge the power of large corporations who paid coffee growers an "unfair" price.<sup>72</sup> Consumers in the United States became involved in the affairs of coffee growing countries in Latin America, and they clamored for political changes

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<sup>72</sup> The twentieth century "fair trade" movement was not limited to coffee, but the coffee industry was one of its targets. See Mark Pendergrast's discussion of the trade war between Brazil and the U.S. over Brazil's "unfair" attempts to regulate the coffee market (1999:77-94)

that would establish a fair coffee price. American politicians leveled charges of exploitation against Latin American coffee growers, whom they considered exploitative profit-mongers.

A hundred years later, the issue of "fair trade" coffee emerged again among consumers in the US. It was also an urban-based consumer movement that challenged corporate power and the prices paid to coffee growers in Latin America. However, these two movements had completely opposite concepts of fairness. "Fair Trade I" believed that coffee-growers were paid unfairly *high* prices that hurt *consumers* by price-gouging; "Fair Trade II" believes that coffee *producers* are paid unfairly *low* prices that threaten the livelihood of small-scale farmers. Under Fair Trade I, coffee-producing nations instituted subsidies or price floors that stabilized the industry and helped their own agricultural sectors. Under Fair Trade II, coffee consumers establish price floors and voluntary subsidies for coffee growers *outside* of the borders of their own countries. Under Fair Trade I, the standards of "fairness" were determined by political processes within individual nation-states; Under Fair Trade II, non-governmental institutions, rather than states, establish and maintain the definition of fair trade through a non-political process. Both movements were led by consumers fighting for moral concepts of fairness, but there could hardly be a more drastic reversal of philosophies of social justice. The difference between these two understandings of "fair trade" is a telling example of the differences between modern and postmodern concepts of justice.

Under "Fair Trade I," states developed various policies that ran counter to abstract "pure" capitalism, such as protectionist tariffs and subsidies intended to benefit particular nation-states or classes within them. Although specific policies may have been international, as in the case of favorable tariff rates for strategic allies or investment in international development projects, such endeavors were promoted in

the name of national security or strategic interest, rather than moral obligation. Although moral rhetoric has often been used (e.g. "promoting the cause of freedom"), the political interests of the Cold War overshadowed the moral element of these efforts until the 1990s. The rhetoric of moral obligation was often used to justify economic aid, but such policies were clearly guided by national interest rather than a disinterested concept of right.

Agricultural subsidies are perhaps the clearest example a policy that abandons pure market logic in the interest of national economic stability. Tariffs and duties are other means by which individual nation-states can protect their own citizens, or those of strategic allies, through policies that counteract pure market forces. Subsidies provide a stable supply of goods for consumers, while also protecting producers from foreign competition and market volatility. Most state-directed social policy has been conducted in the name of *national* interests, or as a means for democratic governments to curry the favor of certain interest groups within the population.

In contrast, fair trade is transnational. The centers of demand for fair trade are Western Europe, the United States, and Japan, three places where coffee is not produced (with the exception of the U.S. state of Hawaii and Puerto Rico). These countries are the world's largest coffee consumers by volume. Fair trade consumers are thinking about the well-being of people outside of their own nations and trying to develop transnational strategies to address their concerns.

In addition, fair trade is a trans-class movement. The people fighting for fair trade are educated, wealthy consumers who can afford to pay twelve dollars for a pound of coffee beans, yet they are supporters of agrarian politics. From a purely economic standpoint, fair trade raises the price of coffee for consumers. In Fair Trade I,

producers fought for higher prices and consumers fought for lower prices, acting in accordance with economic interests.

Fair trade is non-political. The standards of fair labor practices are determined through a non-democratic, non-governmental process. Fair trade is based on raising incomes for producers without the involvement of political structures in the producing countries. Fittingly, fair trade grew in popularity in the nineties, precisely after the International Coffee Agreement, an international political cartel that stabilized the industry through quotas and price supports, fell apart (Bates 1997).

The fact that the movement originates among coffee consumers in non-producing countries, coupled with its non-democratic decision-making process, open it to the accusations of feel-good paternalism that tend to be leveled against any populist movement driven by elites. I have heard these criticisms of fair trade many times, especially in Honduras, and here I have simplified them for dramatic effect. First, there are the accusations of naïve moralism, e.g. "Why don't you look at the low-paid workers in your own country, like the janitors who clean up after you at Starbucks? Why turn coffee brokers into the bad guys?" Second are the accusations of paternalism, e.g. "What do Americans (or Europeans) know about what's best for coffee farmers? How do you know if *your* version of fairness is the same as theirs?" These criticisms raise important questions about the viability of fair trade. Not incidentally, they parallel criticisms of "internationalist" meddling that are leveled against human rights workers, environmentalists, and other activists working in the developing world that perceive transnational movements as challenges to national sovereignty. The final line of criticism questions the consumerist elements of the movement, e.g. "How can you save the world by shopping? Isn't this just a form of instant gratification that ignores the 'big questions'?" These are all important



questions, and I analyze each of them in turn, beginning with a discussion of the contradictions of consumer based movements, which I believe to be fundamental to an understanding of contemporary fair trade.

### **Can Shopping Change the World? Consumer Politics and Symbolic Redefinition**

The fact that the plight of the world's coffee farmers has become a symbol of the injustices of global capitalism and a *cause célèbre* for progressives is, in itself, worthy of anthropological interpretation. Why has coffee (rather than, say, petroleum, diamonds, sugar, or root beer) attracted so much attention from progressive groups and consumers in the past decade? Why have students on college campuses throughout the world rallied in support of small coffee farmers, demanding that their campuses serve only fair trade coffee? Coffee has always been a volatile industry, with exploitation at various links of the supply chain, from agriculture, to distribution, to retail. Yet only recently has it become a key symbol in public discourse about global capitalism. Why do people see the web of global capitalist relations in the murky depths of an espresso?

Economics are a necessary but insufficient cause of the rising popularity of fair trade; coffee's changing meaning to consumers is far more important. As Roseberry (1996) has ably described, since the 1980s, coffee has shifted from a staple commodity to a highly symbolic expression of social identity.<sup>73</sup> The gourmet coffee phenomenon is an example of a new form of acquisitive connoisseurship which, for Roseberry, is a way for educated professionals to establish a class identity that differentiates them from other class factions. This phenomenon speaks to a more fundamental transformation

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<sup>73</sup> Also see journalist Mark Pendergrast's cultural history of coffee, *Uncommon Grounds* (1999)

that has occurred in the past few decades, as commodity consumption has become one of the principle means by which westerners (and, increasingly, non-westerners) express themselves and create their social identity.

Increased prosperity and consumer choice have created new possibilities for people to fashion themselves according to their own values, but tying one's identity to the fruits of the capitalist market can lead to profound contradictions. In a world where individuality is valued, how does one simultaneously depend on mass-produced goods *and* assert individual creative autonomy? Relying on commodities to express oneself can provoke ambivalence if the objects of desire are contradictory to the values people use to define themselves (Turner 2002). How can the emphasis on individuality that is so vital to modern capitalism be reconciled with a world that has been standardized by the unprecedented power of a few large global corporations to guide consumer tastes, and where spontaneous expressions of individuality are often snatched up and "massified" in the search for profit?<sup>74</sup>

One consequence of the increased symbolic importance of commodities is that the process by which commodities are produced has drawn considerable popular attention. This has given rise to the anti-sweatshop movement, the organic and 'slow foods' movements, as well as the anti-mass consumerism expressed in popular books like *No-Logo* and *Fast Food Nation*. In addition, we have seen the rise of "pop-commodity chain studies"--television shows, articles, and best-selling books that trace the origins of mass-produced foods from farm, to factory, to market.

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<sup>74</sup> On this point, Starbucks is a good example. A company that began as a movement against mass consumerism became one of the most hated symbols of cultural homogeneity. Thomas Frank has called this process "the conquest of cool."

The ambivalence over commodity-dependence is especially common among the professional classes, who tend not to be directly involved in the material production of commodities and are alienated by mass consumerism, searching for a way to add an aura of uniqueness and individuality in a massified consumer world. Coffee has become such a powerful symbol of the contemporary upper-class, schooled in the countercultural values of the sixties, that American journalist David Brooks famously referred to new wealthy/highly-educated communities as "latté towns" (Brooks 2000:104). Brooks struck a nerve by coining the term "Bobo" or "bourgeois bohemian" (Brooks 2000). The "bobo" ideology is rooted in a value of the "particular," "the unique," and "the authentic," but, contradictorily, the practices associated with this ideology center on the consumption of mass commodities.

The result of these processes has been an ever-expanding search for "authentic" commodities in a homogenized world. The fact that much of the anti-corporate movements of the past few decade have been specifically targeted at ubiquitous consumer brands like McDonalds, The Gap, Nike, and Starbucks reflect the valorization or heterogeneity, which is often considered to be an important aspect of postmodernity. Interestingly, a large proportion of the "brand bullies" (Klein 1999) are food or clothing companies. Universally-recognized brands like Kodak, Gillette, or Samsung do not arouse ambivalent feelings like Nike, The Gap, or McDonalds. Food and clothing are important elements of the creation of one's social identity, so they are the most targeted symbols of homogenization. Food and clothing companies are disproportionately singled out as the agents of globalization, so coffee is a natural target.

Educated, cosmopolitan people are especially ambivalent about their coffee--it is an addictive necessity for the professional lifestyle. Every office has a coffee maker, and

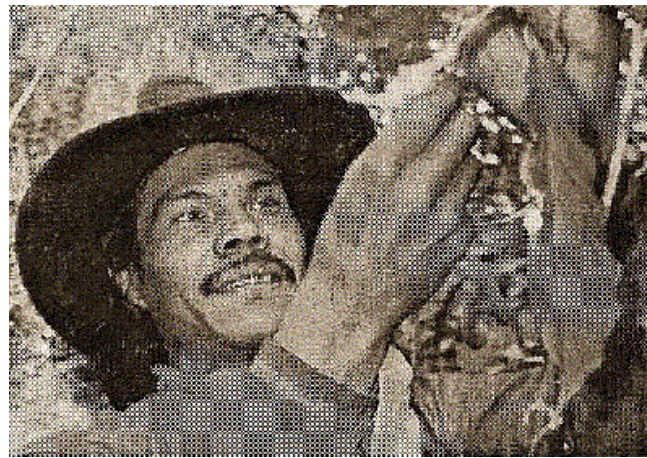
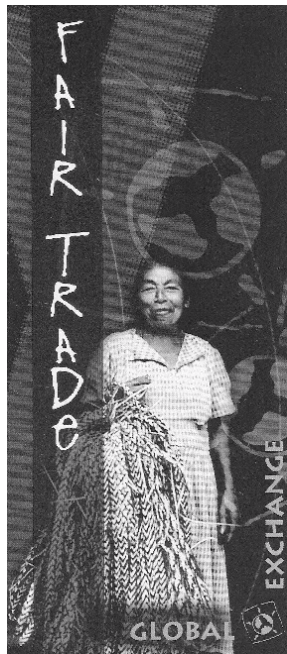
it is often the fuel that powers intellectual work. The coffee habit is hard to kick. Addiction is bad enough--addiction to a product that compromises one's sense of justice is even worse--a physical and moral vice. To resolve this ambivalence, "fair trade" has turned buying habits into political action in a particularly novel way. Whereas earlier forms of consumer activism, such as boycotts, avoided products for ethical reasons, "fair trade" promotes the purchase of "moral" or "ethical" products. Fair trade does not call for a personal sacrifice, rather, it calls for virtuous indulgence--changing the world by shopping.

Compared to other tropical food products, the "story" of coffee is easy to tell. Sugar provides a useful comparison, since it is also a mild stimulant mainly grown in the tropics. Sugar is a relatively undifferentiated product. Although there are a few "boutique" sugars on the market and a few types of fair trade sugar, it is far more standardized than coffee. There are only a few brands of sugar on the supermarket shelves, and no brand carries any symbolic message about status or lifestyle. Unlike coffee, sugar is used as an ingredient in hundreds of processed foods like soft-drinks and candy. Coffee is consumed in relatively unadulterated form, and it is not used in many processed foods. It would be almost impossible to try to know the origin of the sugar we consume, since it is found in so many products and in so many forms (fructose, glucose, dextrose, sucrose, etc), and is produced all over the world, including the United States. Coffee is easy to follow from plantation to cup because it is purchased as a whole or ground bean with relatively little modification.

For fifty years, the image of the coffee farmer in the United States has been Juan Valdez, the trademark of Colombia's National Federation of Coffee Growers (FNC) since the 1950s, when the image was created by advertising agency Doyle Dane Bernbach. As an idealized version of the rural producer, this image is a nostalgic nod

to the Jeffersonian rural tradition, a man and his mule (see Figure 6). In an age where industrialization and the global expansion of corporate food production make the small farmer into a valued nostalgic category, this image of the small coffee farmer is appealing. As Jackson Lears points out, the rural ideal has a long history in American advertising (1994:124). Some of the earliest ads were Currier and Ives style prints that idealized rural family life, and some of the most endearing U.S. ad campaigns, such as Uncle Ben's rice, the Cream of Wheat man, Aunt Jemima, and the Corn Flakes girl, have all used nostalgic depictions of rural life to sell industrial food products. The relatively unadulterated form in which we consume coffee, coupled with an idealized version of the small farmers who grow it, make it easy to put a "face" behind coffee, especially when compared to commodities like sugar (or tea and bananas) that are associated with plantation agriculture. However, the early Juan Valdez image was an iconic reference to coffee farmers, whereas the faces of fair trade are supposed to correspond to real individuals whom the consumer is supporting with his or her purchase.

Raymond Williams makes a related point in *The Country and the City* (1973), arguing that the rise of industrial capitalism led to the valorization of poetic descriptions of "nature" in English literature. The inverse of industrial urbanization--an edenic concept of nature--became fetishized, and this led to the development of parks, gardens, and other examples of "controlled nature." Similarly, small-scale production can only obtain its nostalgic value under advanced capitalism, in which mass-produced goods are the norm. Although this valorization of "simplicity" is founded on principles of social justice and progressive politics, it has an inherently conservative component, in that it requires coffee farmers to fit within a nostalgic cultural category derived from contemporary ideological trends in the developed West. The image of



Photos from Fair Trade coffee promotional pamphlets, Global Exchange



Juan Valdez, logo of the Colombia National Coffee Growers Federation

Figure 7 The Faces of Coffee

the unmediated, direct linkage between coffee grower and coffee drinker not only obscures many of the complicated intermediaries between the two parties, it is itself a mediated product of marketing and branding.

### **Two Forms of Consumer Politics: Sacrifice and Virtuous Indulgence**

The fact that the fair trade movement is based on the changing symbolic meaning of coffee does not, by itself, limit its potential as a political project. Indeed, two of modern history's most important revolutionary movements, the American Revolution and the struggle for Indian independence, were both dependent on the power of consumers to redefine the meaning of commodities. These two movements provide instructive points of comparison to fair trade.

Since the late eighteenth century, boycotts have been a common and effective form of public political action. Fair trade follows in the tradition of the boycott, but shifts the politics of consumption from the public to the private spheres. Previous types of consumer activism were inherently public, such as the anti-English boycotts leading up to the American Revolution (Breen 2004) and the Swadeshi movement in India (Cohn 1996; Goswami 1998). Both are historically important examples where citizens effected political change by harnessing their purchasing power. Both boycotts were successful because individuals communicated their political affiliation through "conspicuous non-consumption." Because boycotts are based on a prohibition, they are representative of the "sacrifice model."

Here, I use the word "sacrifice" in the mainstream sense, meaning abstinence for the sake of a higher principle. People commonly say, "I make sacrifices for my family,"

"my country," etc. This sense of the word differs from the anthropological definition of sacrifice developed by Robertson Smith and Durkheim, which refers to communal feasts and other "positive rites," that are not based on prohibition but are based on communal consumption. The mainstream definition of "sacrifice" is more like a prohibition or abstinence, which Durkheim described as "negative rites" (1995:303-329). In the case of boycotts, the prohibition is not a ritual practice but a matter of choice that establishes a like-minded community.

Durkheim saw positive and negative rites as directly related. Negative rites (boycotts/prohibitions) presuppose communal sacrifice, because abstinence permits a person entrance into to a specific cult by "fleeing the profane world" and "foregoing sensuous interests" (1995:321). By abstaining from profane things, a person showed respect for the sacred collectivity by suppressing egoistic desire (1995:326).

"Negative rites" are necessary to establishment of a cult, which, for Durkheim, was the most basic form of collective social unit beyond the immediate kin-group. A person must demonstrate that he or she acts according to the principles of the group through prohibition.

Durkheim believed that the practices of the totemic cult served to represent the moral force of society. In this sense, they formed the basis of all religious thought, which was, in its most elementary form, the moral code of a given collectivity. Boycotts are based on collective abstinence for the sake of a moral principle, and groups of people display their allegiance to a particular moral code through participation in a boycott. Though the decision to participate is an individual one, it is oriented towards a collectively-held belief. This symbolic element of boycotts is often more effective



than their economic component. Boycotts are public spectacles that admit one into a group of people who share certain values, through a display of personal discipline.

T.H. Breen's *The Marketplace of Revolution* (2004) provides a detailed history of how a boycott of English goods shaped the American Revolution. Breen makes a strong argument that the decision to forego the purchase of imported British goods was a key idiom through which American colonists expressed support for the revolutionary cause. The language of personal sacrifice and the ability to overcome temptation were important parts of this movement. Tea, an addictive drug-food, was an especially tempting product, so the ability to forego tea-drinking displayed political commitment. Breen writes;

...the colonists' shared experience as consumers provided them with the cultural resources needed to develop a bold new form of political protest. In this unprecedented context, private decisions were interpreted as political acts; consumer choices communicated personal loyalties. Goods became the foundation of trust, for one's willingness to sacrifice the pleasures of the market provided a remarkably visible and effective test of allegiance (xvi).

To not drink tea was a show of commitment to the revolutionary cause. It required great discipline and restraint. Breen's book is filled with passionate quotations from people speaking about the moral danger of tea drinking: A sermon published in Lancaster, Pennsylvania decried:

This baneful wicked herb is the match by which an artful wicked ministry intended to blow up the liberties of America...Continuing to purchase tea, under present circumstances, is high treason against three million Americans (qtd. in Breen, 306)

Another writer from South Carolina exclaimed:

‘the baneful chests’ of tea forced on America by the East India Company contained ‘in them a slow poison, in a political as well as physical sense. They contain something worse than death--the seeds of SLAVERY.’ (306)

Breen continues:

By mid-1774 drinking tea had become equated in the popular mind with political sin. No longer could one pretend that private enjoyments within one’s own family did not have public consequences. Anyone could see that tea, like an insidious drug, allowed conspirators in the mother country to erode colonial rights....As ‘a woman’ informed readers of a Massachusetts journal, "In the present case the use of tea is considered not as a *private* but a *public* evil; so the arguments used against it should be of a public nature" (306).

Breen offers a sophisticated account of the Boston Tea Party (December 6, 1773), one of the iconic events in American history. U.S. schoolchildren learn at an early age that American colonists boycotted English tea to oppose "taxation without representation." During the Tea Party, a group of Bostonian merchants who called themselves the "Sons of Liberty" disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians and boarded an English merchant ship docked in Boston Harbor. They dumped a shipment of tea overboard, in a statement against the recently passed Tea Act, which imposed a small customs duty on tea in order to raise revenue for the struggling East India Company. Breen argues that the Tea Party was one in a series of events where consumer choice served as a public display of political sentiment, and that such acts were an important stimulant for collective anti-English action in the then-inchoate nation. Breen argues that the Tea Party and other public acts served as "symbolic redefinitions."

Within barely a generation, the meaning of the items of everyday consumption had changed substantially...imported items...had served as markers of a British identity, and as they flooded into the homes of yeoman and gentry alike, they linked ordinary men and women with the distant exciting culture of the metropolis...By taxing these goods, however, Parliament set in motion a process of symbolic

redefinition...straining the colonial relationship to the breaking point...Private consumer experiences were transformed into public rituals (329).

Whereas tea had been a valued sign of refinement, civilization, and status (like most other imported goods), the tea boycott turned it into a symbol of dependency and tyranny, inverting the symbolic order of colonialism. The emergence of a capitalist market had created a new language of consumer choice in the expanding colonies, and Breen argues that this new language was used to communicate revolutionary political sentiment.

The Indian *swadeshi* movement is another example of a boycott which redefined British goods in protest to colonial dependency. *Swadeshi* was a call to purchase locally-made goods *and* boycott imported ones, so it could be seen as both a sacrifice and a virtuous indulgence. Its power clearly came from the decision to forego imports that could not be substituted with Indian-made ones. The locally-made textiles were simple, homespun garments, as opposed to the prestigious Lancashire cottons that were worn by the British. Goswami (1998) cites a popular *swadeshi* song written in 1870 which exemplified the movement's spirit of abstinence, saying "We will eat our own coarse grain and wear the rough, home-spun cloth, What do we care for lavender and imported trinkets?" (625). The public display of sacrifice became even more apparent after 1907, when, under Gandhi's leadership, the *swadeshi* movement became even more radical. Cohn (1992) writes:

The [goals of the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal 1903-1908] were complex, but one aim was to encourage the development and use of indigenously produced goods through a boycott of European manufactures. As the movement developed, there was increasing discussion and propaganda to encourage Indian weavers and to revive the hand spinning of cotton thread. These ideas were taken up and formalized by Mahatma Gandhi in the next decade...Gandhi continually articulated and elaborated on the theme that the Indian people would only be free from European domination,

both politically and economically, when the masses took to spinning, weaving, and wearing homespun cotton cloth, khadi (148-149).

Unlike the American boycott, there is no fine-grained history of how swadeshi spread through the Indian masses. But Goswami and Cohn's work makes clear that a collective boycott of English goods played an important role in communicating anti-English sentiment. Like the American "symbolic redefinition" of tea, the Indian boycott of imported English goods turned the symbols of virtue into markers of tyranny. The success of boycotts rests in their power of "symbolic redefinition." By turning imported goods from signs of wealth and refinement to signs of dependency and injustice, they shift the terms of political debate. Non-consumption signified solidarity with nascent nationalist movements.

### *The Virtuous Indulgence Model*

The virtuous indulgence model is the opposite of the boycott. Rather than calling for a prohibition of certain goods, this type of action calls for consumers to purchase products that conform to a particular set of values. This type of action has been less successful than boycotts in effecting political change, mainly because it is a private act that does not establish a community through the suppression of individual gratification. In these cases, individual choices are interpreted as political acts, but these acts do not communicate a message outward.

The union-labeling movement, which began in the 1870s, presents an illustrative comparative case to fair trade. One of the most important unions in U.S. history, the Cigar Makers' International Union of America, initiated a campaign to advertise certain cigars as "union made" in order to differentiate them from cigars made by

Chinese immigrant labor.<sup>75</sup> This union was led by a young Samuel Gompers, who would later become the most influential figure in U.S. labor history. In 1872, the Cigar Cutters International Union placed a blue stamp on boxes of cigars that said "This certifies that a cigar has been made by a first-class workman, a member of the Cigar Makers' International Union of America." This program was an attempt to improve union-members' working conditions by appealing to anti-Chinese sentiment and nationalism. At that time, large numbers of Chinese immigrants were producing cheap cigars in New York City, and the CMIU, consisting of mostly European immigrants, used both racism and nationalism to promote their cause.

By the early twentieth century, the union label discourse had changed, using public outcry against monopoly trusts--rather than cheap immigrant labor--to arouse support. Badges and posters in support of the Cigar Makers Union read, "Don't Support the Trust. Buy Blue Label Cigars" in 1905. At that time, there was considerable controversy surrounding the monopolistic control of the American Tobacco Company, a trust controlled by the Duke family. The "union label" purchase was a statement against big business, and it came at a point in history when the U.S. government was enacting anti-trust legislation and other Progressive-era policies, such as the Pure Food and Drug Act, designed to curtail the power of large corporations in the interest of the public good. This is the political platform that I have earlier referred to as "Fair Trade I."

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<sup>75</sup> Indeed, "it was his own union that in 1872 introduced in San Francisco the usage of the union label to distinguish for consumers the cigars produced by workers employed under a union agreement from those made by non-union Chinese immigrant workers" (Vernon Briggs, "American Unionism and U.S. Immigration Policy" *Center for Immigration Studies Background*, August 2001 ).

In the late-twentieth century, the Union Label reappeared, and moved back towards an explicitly nationalistic agenda. Through the sixties and seventies, U.S. manufacturing had lost considerable clout as production moved overseas and the domestic economy became oriented towards the service sector. In 1975, the "union label" advertising campaign appeared in TV and radio spots. It's lyrics are:

Look for the union label  
when you are buying that coat, dress or blouse.

Remember somewhere our union's sewing,  
our wages going to feed the kids, and run the house.

We work hard, but who's complaining?  
Thanks to the I.L.G. we're paying our way!

So always look for the union label,  
it says we're able to make it in the U.S.A.!

This song is clearly meant to appeal to nationalism and "family values." The International Ladies Garment Union highlights the fact that wages are "going to feed the kids, and run the house" and that its products are made in the U.S.A. This effort would lead to the "Made in the U.S.A" or "Buy American" campaigns which became popular in the 1980s. These movements developed within a recessionary economic climate and a cultural milieu that stressed the sunset of American economic power and the escalating power of Japan. As economic integration made foreign manufacture and assembly an inescapable part of life, "patriotic spending" became the latest incarnation of the "virtuous indulgence" model.

By the nineties, economic prosperity and the sunny future of "globalization" had turned such nationalistic projects into anachronisms, and the "Made in the USA" movement faded considerably after the passage of NAFTA in 1992. Even the Democratic Party, longtime advocates of protectionist measures, began to embrace free-marketism. By 2000, at the height of the millennial optimism towards globalization, the New York Times Magazine published a feature article by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, arguing that American consumers could do their part to help the cause of global development by purchasing goods from foreign sweatshops.<sup>76</sup> Global economic integration became the dominant vision of progress, and protection of the economic interests of particular nation-states was seen as an obstacle to global prosperity and stability. As images of McDonalds in Moscow flickered across the screens of American households, "Made in the USA" disappeared from public discourse.

Returning the Durkheim's distinction between positive and negative rites, these cases show that "negative" acts of prohibition, such as boycotts, have had considerable political impact, while "positive" acts of virtuous consumption have had less success. Non-consumption is far more public than virtuous consumption. The decision to forego tea or imported clothing is visible to other people, and sends a powerful symbolic message. In contrast, only the consumer knows if he or she has "looked for the Union Label" or bought fair trade coffee, because these are not apparent in the physical properties of the commodity, and the consumer still smokes cigars or drinks coffee. Only the buyer and seller witness the quasi-political act, making virtuous indulgence a basically private phenomenon.

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<sup>76</sup> "Two Cheers for Sweatshops," September 24, 2000

In order for fair trade to have a lasting impact, it must be based upon a clear theory of social justice and exploitation. This would require an accurate understanding of the coffee commodity chain. The coffee industry is an exceptionally complex case. Coffee is traded on the global commodities market, and its price is determined by a complex set of forces that reach far beyond basic supply and demand, including currency exchange rates, the investment strategy of hedge funds and other structured financial products, weather, and political factors. To determine who is exploited, if anyone, one must look at all the links in the commodity chain in order to understand how surplus value is produced. Sociologist John Talbot (1997) addressed this very question in his analysis of the production and retention of surplus along the coffee commodity chain. Talbot's analysis was based upon statistical data about the costs of the production, processing, and retailing of coffee. It does not contain any micro-level information about individuals. In the following section, I will describe the coffee commodity chain by focusing on two very different farmers from La Quebrada. When viewed in conjunction with the macro-level perspective provided by Talbot (1997), their experiences show that the "fair trade" narrative relies on an overly simplistic version of the relationship between coffee growers and consumers.

### **Part III: Who Determines Fairness? Coffee Production from La Quebrada to Queens**

I came to La Quebrada in 2001 as a very marginal part of a development project that was designed to help coffee growers establish an ecological co-operative and access the fair trade market in the U.S. and Europe. I was "marginal" because the organizers



of the project knew that I was skeptical about fair trade, and encouraged me to be critical in my own writings about the project in the interest of institutional self-critique. At the time, I was planning to begin a coffee commodity chain study as doctoral research, and this project provided a convenient point of entry. Although the project paid my way to Honduras, I was not "inside" the project in a bureaucratic or professional sense. I had no professional commitment to the project's organizers. Like many graduate students looking for a research topic, I was an unusually fortunate academic tourist, poking around a small town for selfish reasons, trying to do some good, but not sure how to do it. To the people in Honduras affiliated with the fair trade project from the beginning, I was probably more of an annoying interloper than anything else.

As I described in the Preface of this work, the fair trade cooperative in La Quebrada never really got off the ground. Without dwelling on the minutiae of the project, let me briefly explain what happened: First, the cooperative was never fair trade certified. The average land-holdings of the co-operative members were too high for them to be considered "small farmers" by the standards developed by the IFLO for Honduras. In theory, they could have denied membership to large and medium-sized growers, but Prudencio Flores, one of the co-op's leaders, was also its largest landholder. He could not pursue this strategy without being labeled a hypocrite. Given his already polarizing presence in town politics (described in Chapter 4), this would have only confirmed the suspicions that he was a fraud. The co-op could have tried to attract small landholders, thereby lowering its average acreage, but small coffee-farmers lived on the edge of survival and were the least likely group to join a risky, fledgling cooperative that had a strong chance of failure. After a year or two of successful harvests, they may have been willing to join, but the first group of co-op

members were embarking on an unknown path. As it happened, the cooperative's members were stuck between two categories: They were too small to profitably produce export coffee, but they were too large to be eligible for "fair trade."

The second cause of the co-op's failure (and one that I cannot emphasize enough) was the worldwide crisis in coffee prices that occurred between 2000 and 2003. During these years, the average price paid to Honduran coffee farmers dropped from a dollar to fifty-three cents. Because the co-op could not be "fair trade" certified, they tried to be certified as "organic." Organic certification would have enabled them to receive a higher price for their crop. The transition to organic production takes at least two full crop-seasons. During this transition, yields dropped significantly at the exact moment when prices were at historic lows. During its first crop season, the co-op had to sell for far below the cost of production. After this failure, almost all of the members quit the co-operative, and could no longer trust its leadership. When I returned to La Quebrada in 2003, Prudencio had retired from local politics, and there was no popular initiative to reform the co-op.

I continued to pursue my interest in the coffee industry alongside my research on migration and religious change. My key informant was Javier Montoya, a returned migrant who owned about fifteen acres of coffee. I continued my relationship with Prudencio, who had moved to Tegucigalpa but lived in La Quebrada during the coffee harvest. He allowed me to work as a picker on his farm for a day, partnered with one of his seasonal workers. I also became friendly with a large coffee-grower named Tony Chan, who grows his coffee in La Quebrada, but sells it near his home in Queens, New York. I will focus on the cases of Javier and Tony, because they are growers who have spent considerable time living and working both in the U.S. and Honduras, and have particularly cosmopolitan perspectives on the industry.

Javier Montoya is a medium sized grower by Honduran standards, owning about fifteen acres of land; Tony is a relatively large-scale grower. At 125 acres, Tony's farm is large by Honduran standards, but small compared to the large *fincas* found in other parts of Central America. Unlike Guatemala or El Salvador, Honduras has no class of coffee elites, and the majority of farms are in the hands of smallholders. Both Javier and Tony have lived and worked in the United States, and both have seen the coffee trade from a variety of perspectives. Their worldly experiences have given them insight about the inequalities inherent in the world coffee market, but neither is an advocate of fair trade. I detail their experiences to provide a sense of the complexity of the coffee industry that is obscured by the direct farmer to consumer narrative of fair trade, and to ask who sets the terms of farmer participation in the market under fair trade and mainstream coffee production.

### **Javier Montoya: Culture of Risk**

A coffee economy is inherently risky. Prices swing wildly. Bad weather or disease can kill an entire crop. Farmers have assets--such as land, buildings, machinery, and vehicles--that are not insured. In case of fire or theft, they have nowhere to turn. Many live in a perpetual state of debt, so the profits of the boom years go to paying off interest accrued during the bust years.

For hired pickers, the risks are omnipresent as well. There is always a chance that a fall in the fields will put a picker out of work for the season. The slopes are steep and slippery, and it is common for people to trudge up and down them with hundred pound loads on their backs. Injuries are common, and there is no "safety net" for workers,

save the generosity of kin, friends, neighbors, or church-members. Coffee farmers accept the fact that they will have some bad years and some good years, and accept a great deal of risk as a fact of life. The idea of "stability" or economic security is so contrary to their lived experience that I never heard a coffee-farmer mention it as a goal. The business is inherently volatile, and, in general, coffee growers do not consider risk to be a problem.

Javier was my closest friend in the field, and I had great respect for his honesty and business-savvy. I spent virtually every day with him for six months, and he became my *de facto* guide to life in La Quebrada. He taught me about the risks of coffee farming and continually assured me that there was nothing wrong or unfair about the business--I just didn't think like a coffee farmer.

Javier is a realist who never mentions any abstract principles in which he believes. He believes in Jesus, but does not go to church often. His home contains religious posters and he listens to religious music, but he never talks about the content of his religious beliefs. He does not complain about the coffee business, and sees it as a speculative endeavor with a potential for great individual success or failure, depending on some combination of personal ability, fate, luck, and Providence. To me, Javier seemed almost ridiculously comfortable with risk, and I once told him that I couldn't handle such risk. He laughed and said, "Uiii (laughing)...if you only knew how many times I've made money and then lost it all...That's the way life is when you grow coffee. That's how it works here." He felt that people who complain about low coffee prices simply do not understand that every bust is followed by a boom. He had lost his shirt several times, but that was the nature of the business.

Javier sees nothing "unfair" the coffee industry in general. I asked him about whether low prices to growers are fair and he said, "Look, when I worked in the US, I looked for the cheapest coffee I could find....We all [the Honduran migrants] bought the huge refillable mug from the gas station mini-mart or Sam's Club. It was like ninety-nine cents and you keep the cup...If I'm buying coffee, I want it cheap. If I'm selling it, I want it to be expensive." For Javier, coffee was a business with clear rules.

Javier inherited three acres of low-quality coffee land from a grandparent in 1996, when he was still in his teens. During the 1997-1998 harvest, coffee prices were extremely high, with growers being paid as much as \$2.00 per pound. Javier, then only nineteen years old, made a significant amount of money. Reminiscing about those days of plenty, he told me that at one point he had \$15,000 cash stored under his bed in a cardboard box. Thinking that coffee prices would remain high, he took out a loan from a local moneylender to purchase an additional plot of high-grown coffee at a time when land prices were high due to the optimism in the coffee sector. Javier and his wife, who was then pregnant, built a nursery and replanted thousands of high-yielding *catuai* plants themselves, "on their hands and knees," banking on a positive future for coffee. He thought that he was making a wise investment.

In the 1998-1999 harvest, coffee prices dropped to only 75 cents per pound, and Hurricane Mitch hit in October, just before the start of the harvest. Although Mitch did not destroy Javier's crop, it made the roads impassable for almost a month, making it costly to transport his crop for sale. Even if his crop arrived at a mill or wholesaler, they could not transport it to the coast for export, so many exporters stopped buying coffee altogether. Javier could not pay his debt (at 5% monthly interest), and decided to immigrate temporarily to the U.S. to make some money to pay off the debt. Javier

was able to secure a tourist visa because he owned a considerable amount of land, and employed the common strategy of using the funds of friends and family members to pad his bank account so that it would appear to embassy officials that he was far wealthier than he actually was, therefore helping his chances of obtaining a visa.

Javier ended up in Denver, Colorado, where a friend from vocational school lived and worked. A trained electrician, he worked as an electrician's assistant in the suburbs and earned enough money in one year of work in the U.S. to repay his debt and return to Honduras. In 2003-2004, he did not need to borrow money to fertilize his field in the off-season, which is quite uncommon for all but the wealthiest farmers. He hired a year-round foreman for an annual salary of 24,000 lempira (about \$1500 US), who managed the pruning, weeding, and fertilization of the fields, as well as the timing of the harvest. Javier paid his pickers 35 lempira (\$2) per hundred pounds of coffee cherries. This was the "going rate" at the height of the harvest. Some of the pickers were relatives or neighbors, and some were migrants that come to La Quebrada during the harvest season. He paid his cousins and other relatives the same amount that he paid strangers, indicating his lack of sentimentality when it came to coffee production.

In 2003, he sold hundred pound bags of unprocessed cherries for 120 lempira (\$7.50) to a local miller. This would yield about 18-20 pounds of processed beans. He sold at a guaranteed price, known as a *deposito*, which is essentially an unwritten futures contract. Prior to the harvest, he agreed to sell his whole crop to the miller at that rate in order to mitigate risk. Both he and the miller were satisfied with that price, although either one could lose out depending on how the price moved in the following months. If it rose above 120, Javier would lose, and if it dropped below 120, the miller would lose. Both sides use the *deposito* contract as a hedge against price

volatility. In this case, the market price dropped to 100 lempira, so Javier came out on top by 20%.

Assuming that Javier sells one hundred pounds for 120 lempira, he makes a modest profit. Subtract the costs of harvesting, fertilizer, transportation, and the labor of a foreman, which I calculate at 66 lempira, he makes a profit of 54 lempira (US \$3) per hundred pounds of cherries, which is only marginally more than the pickers earn. He produced about 100,000 pounds of coffee in 2003, so his profit would be about \$3000 for the year. This provides a relatively high standard of living in rural Honduras. It requires little physical labor for the landowner and provides several months of leisure time. Javier wasn't getting rich, but he had no reason to complain.

The miller is responsible for washing, depulping, fermenting, drying, bagging, and transporting the beans to be exported in San Pedro Sula, a large industrial city near Puerto Cortes, the Caribbean port from which coffee is shipped to New York, Hamburg, or New Orleans. The exporter processes the beans a second time for quality control, and then sorts and bags the beans for export. Once the coffee arrives in port, it is sold at auction. The price set by the New York Board of Trade is the most important determinant in the going-rate for coffee. The buyers at auction could be small boutique roasters or multinational corporations. Javier's coffee is a mild, washed arabica, which is more valuable than the bitter *robusta* variety. However, his crop is not specialty-grade, so it is most likely sold to big roasters that blend coffees from all over the world, like Folgers, Maxwell House, Nescafé, or Chock Full O' Nuts. Folgers is owned by Kraft Foods, which is owned by the Altria Group, formerly Phillip Morris. Maxwell House is a brand owned by Procter and Gamble. Chock Full O' Nuts is owned by Sara Lee Foods, and Nescafé is part of Nestle Foods.

The local miller has a large capital investment in the mill machinery, and pays labor, overhead, and transport costs. During the 2003-2004 harvest, the miller was selling beans to the exporter at 650 lempira per hundred pounds. At this price he lost money on Javier's coffee. Like Javier, he was constantly speculating, buying coffee low and holding it until he could make a modest profit. He had to sell small amounts at the low prices to cover his operating costs, but he held a lot of his stock in anticipation of increases. Although he lost money on Javier's coffee, he purchased from other growers at lower rates, and ended up making a small profit for the season.

Javier is a small-scale grower, but he earned more profit than the miller. I document their case to show that coffee intermediaries, such as the miller, are not making great profits in the coffee trade when compared with people on the distribution and retail side of the business. Although the common name *coyote* suggests that intermediaries like the miller are greedy outsiders who profit off the labor of others, this may be an unfair characterization. In this case, the *coyote* sells his coffee to Molinos de Honduras, an exporter that is a subsidiary of Volcafe, the world's third-largest green coffee trader. Volcafe sells to the major coffee roasters--publicly-traded corporations like Procter and Gamble, Sara Lee, Nestle, and Starbucks. Volcafe is a subsidiary of London-based ED&F Man Holdings, one of the world's largest corporations and operator of a hedge fund worth tens of billions of dollars. It would be futile to trace the chain of profit across all of these intricate networks, from Javier's farm, to New York, to the bank accounts of ED&F Man's investors or shareholders in Altria or P&G. It is clear, however, that is arbitrary and myopic to focus on the local *coyote* or miller as the exploitative middleman in this process, and it is equally myopic to suggest that merely paying a farmer a bit more for his crop is "fair."



Additionally Starbucks, Procter and Gamble, and other multinationals purchase "fair trade" certified coffee from exporters like Volcafe. For these companies, the true value of "fair trade" derives from its role in a public relations strategy that deflects accusations of exploitation without hurting profits. In these cases, fair trade growers, represented in brochures and advertisements as fetishized small farmers, provide unpaid advertising to multinational corporations that puts a "human face" on their coffee.<sup>77</sup> How can the small-scale, local, intermediaries be seen as exploitative middlemen in this system that involves participants at the highest levels of the global economy?

Javier has no interest in fair trade because he would never join a cooperative, a requirement for fair trade certification. In La Quebrada, personal trust is absolutely essential to the coffee business, and it is hard for Javier to think of the business in non-personalistic terms. Personal trust is especially important within the weak Honduran legal system. If someone writes a bad check or fails to comply with a contract, the dispute is rarely settled in court, except in the cities, due to corruption, a lack of legal titles, and high levels of illiteracy, which make people prefer verbal agreements over written ones. Sometimes, disputes are resolved by the threat of violence, or, at times, violence between disputing parties. Usually, one party just loses out and the offending party's reputation is damaged through local gossip. In such a situation, business is always personal. Javier will only sell his coffee to buyers who have not burned him in the past, people with whom he has an established friendship, and who are known as

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<sup>77</sup> Terence Turner makes this point in relation to the Body Shop's incorporation of Brazil nut oil made by the Kayapó in its hair conditioner. See Turner "Neoliberal Ecopolitics and Indigenous Peoples: The Kayapo, the "Rainforest Harvest," and The Body Shop" *Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Science Bulletin*, 113-127.

honest brokers. For this reason, he would never join a cooperative, because he values his own independence above all else. He could never trust the leaders of a cooperative with his crop.

Javier was against fair trade because he would rather have independence than stability. The risk of losing everything was a part of life, and he used his temporary migration to the U.S. as a hedge against financial risk. The only injustices in the coffee industry, for him, were products of the weak rule of law in Honduras. His rather positive view of the coffee trade should not be attributed to a narrow perspective, because he had experience in almost every aspect of the business and had lived and worked in the United States, where he was a habitual--and frugal--coffee consumer. He understood the business quite well, but he accepted the risks and inequalities as the rules of the game. In this sense, his vision of "fairness" basically paralleled the neoliberal vision, in which a strong rule of law, and legal transparency assures that "the rules of the game" are upheld, and individuals can freely compete in an inherently risky marketplace.

## **Coffee Under the Radar--Tony Chan**

Building 45 in the cargo area of JFK Airport is, aesthetically, about as far as one can get from a Starbucks. It looks like a warehouse on the outside, and the inside has the feel of a decrepit public school--lots of fluorescent lights, tiled walls, and squeaky floors obsessively buffed by bored-looking janitors. The building houses Port Authority Police and U.S. Customs officials, and holstered pistols far outnumber laptops. A yellow sign outside the building advertises Star Mountain Coffee, a glorified break-room on the building's first floor, where Tony Chan sells some of the world's most interesting coffee.

Behind a door simply marked "Coffee," Tony sells his product for \$1.25 per cup, one size only. The coffee is grown on Tony's farm in La Quebrada. A Taiwanese immigrant who became a coffee farmer after being fired from McDonalds, Tony ships his coffee to the US, roasts it himself in the JFK cargo area, and sells it to airport workers from three small outposts, one of which is run by his wife. His coffee is specialty-grade, grown at high-altitude and under shade, and meticulously managed at all stages of the production process. He has one paid employee in the US, a full time field boss in Honduras, and serves the coffee himself, seven days a week.

Star Mountain Coffee is of excellent quality, a high-grown, hard-bean arabica suitable for both Espresso and American breakfast styles. The story of Tony Chan's coffee is almost completely opposite to the complex web of transactions that Javier's coffee passes through. In this case, the coffee chain is completely vertically-integrated--it is grown, shipped, roasted, and sold by the cup by Tony. He has seen the coffee trade

from almost every angle and, like Javier, he is an unsentimental realist who values his independence above all else.

I first met Tony in La Quebrada late in my fieldwork. Since 2001, I had heard rumors about *el chino*, a "Chinese" coffee farmer living up in the mountains who had supposedly made millions selling his product in the United States. Given the fact that this rumor was told amidst the most severe coffee crisis in the past half-century, I doubted its veracity. It was unlikely that anyone was getting rich off coffee, because the market price was so low. At first, I chalked the rumor up to small-town jealousy and the myth of easy money in the United States. There was clearly an element of xenophobia to the rumors, blaming one of the community's only ethnic outsiders for exploitative practices.

I also doubted the rumor that Tony exported his own coffee; it is rather difficult for a coffee farmer to obtain an export license from the Honduran government. They usually must work through several established companies, selling to a miller or an exporter, as in Javier's case. Although I had heard farmers speak wishfully about exporting their own coffee, I had never seen it done. Later, I learned that the story was not entirely false. Tony did grow, transport, roast, and retail his own coffee. He had spent several years working to get the export license, and had finally done so, but he was not getting rich. Far from it. He barely broke even.

Tony is a hardened entrepreneur. He became a coffee farmer after being fired from McDonalds in 1993 after eighteen years of employment. He began working at the restaurant at sixteen, making minimum wage. He worked his way up the ladder at McDonalds, eventually becoming a regional supervisor in Queens. He hoped to one

day own a McDonalds restaurant himself, but he was fired, replaced by a younger employee as a way of cutting costs. As he puts it, "I was making too much money for McDonalds. I had been to Hamburger University [a McDonalds training center] twice. I knew everything. How many napkins to order, how many ketchup packets we needed....I had it down to a science. But I made too much money, man. They threw me out and hired some kid out of college making twenty thousand."

Tony 's wife, a Honduran woman whom he had met at McDonalds, heard about a coffee farm for sale in her home country. Out of work but fueled by a mix of ambition and bitterness, Tony used all of his savings and much of his McDonald's pension to buy the property. At first, Tony knew nothing about coffee, and viewed his farm merely as a way to turn a profit. But he soon became caught up in the romance of farming, and now seems to make a constant effort to repress his sentimentality and view his livelihood with the cold objectivity of the shrewd businessman he desires to be. He tells me, "You don't know what being a farmer is like until you do it. You live and die with your plants. If they die, my family dies. I didn't know anything about coffee, but now I love my farm. It's my life." But then he catches himself, and says, "Man, I just want to grow this stuff, bring it to the States, and sell it. That's it, man."

The romantic side takes over while we walk through his farm, early one morning during the harvest. Set in a beautiful cloud forest where the temperature rarely rises above 75 degrees, Tony 's farm is twenty miles from a telephone, and about ten miles from the electrical grid. His fields are filled with tropical fruit trees, birds, and snakes. Pure spring water bubbles out of the ground near his mill, and he has built a house with beautiful views in a clearing at the high point of his farm. In every sense, it is the opposite of his bustling, workaday life in Queens. Families walk up the dirt roads

with their picking baskets, on the way to work. Schools are closed during the harvest, and people come from all over the country to participate in the harvest. In his Queens-by-way-of Taiwan accent, he describes his property as, "paradise, man" and tells me how he wants to move here permanently with his family and lead a pastoral farmer's life.

Tony would do so, if only people did not want to kill him so badly. In the past few years, his home has been burned down three times, his crop has been stolen out of his barn, and he has been attacked by a family of machete-wielding thugs in the central plaza of a nearby town. While I was in Honduras, his field boss was attacked while driving through the farm by two men who shot at him with pistols, leaving bullet holes in the driver side door of his red Nissan pickup. Fortunately, Tony's right hand man was unscathed, but the next time Tony goes to visit his farm, he will wear a bullet-proof vest.

The causes of the violence against Tony are complex, but they reveal quite a bit about the politics of the global coffee market. From 1994 to 1999, coffee prices were over \$1 per pound, but they dropped below 60 cents from 2000 to 2003. Tony pays his pickers slightly above the going rate of about \$2.50 per hundred pounds of coffee cherries, but he is singled out as an exploitative outsider, while other coffee growers are not, due to the fact that he is an absentee landlord, and the impression that he makes millions selling coffee in New York. He balks at the idea that he is exploiting workers, since he is losing money himself. If he were making a profit, they would be paid more. But how can he pay them any more when he is not making a profit? Tony, who arrived in the U.S. as an unskilled immigrant worker, sympathizes with his employees, but feels the violence against him is motivated by a misunderstanding of

the system, for which he is unjustly singled out. He says to me, "Picking coffee all day in the sun, carrying sacks on your back up and down hills, that's no life, man...And then they got nothing to do for the rest of the year, it's no wonder they hate us." I sense some tinges of guilt and ask him if he feels any. "Fuck it, man. I feel *nothing*. I'm just trying to run a business and support my family. I don't want to live like a dog. I've done it before. It's the system we live in."

Tony dreams of expanding his business to the JFK passenger terminal, but concessions for spots in the terminal are only open to national brands. He currently is only roasting about 10,000 of the 100,000 pounds he produces each year, and the rest is sold to a Honduran exporter for the market price of about 65 cents a pound (2002 price). Although Tony would love to receive a higher price for his coffee, he is against fair trade. As he sees it, "fairness" should be based solely on the quality/cost ratio of coffee, without regard for sentiment or altruism. He takes pride in the fact that he can manage every part of the process himself, and would hate to involve intermediaries like certification outfits or cooperatives in the process.

He believes that a "fair" market would be one where marketing and branding were not part of the value equation. He cringes when I mention Starbucks, saying that their coffee is over-priced and over-hyped by advertising, and that, in a taste test, he is sure customers would prefer his brew. Tony believes that his coffee could compete with the Starbucks of the world if he was given a concession to open in the passenger terminal. His coffee is the most unmediated product imaginable, but unless he tells his story through clever marketing, his coffee has little cachet. "Directness" must be mediated in order to have symbolic value. As it is, Tony is struggling. He expects to

make a decent profit this year, since he now has three locations in the airport, but he has lost money in two previous crop years.

The common theme in both Javier and Tony's stories is the belief that the coffee business is inherently risky. One party always wins at the expense of another, and that's just the way it is. This is most apparent in Tony's resigned acceptance of the violence directed against him. He understands what is like to be an exploited worker, and he understands the hopelessness the pickers on his farm face. Yet he feels powerless to change anything. ("I feel nothing...It's the system we live in.") Tony has created a totally efficient and direct coffee production business, but he is barely scraping by. He treats his workers the same as other growers in La Quebrada do, but he is perceived as a carpet-bagger who makes millions in the US.

Just as Tony's workers unfairly target him as the source of their problems, he directs his anger towards the advertisers and marketers who, as he sees it, hype inferior coffee and keep him from relocating to the JFK passenger terminal. The symbolic side of the coffee value chain is the one element that he does not understand or control. He is frustrated by the fact that he grows, transports, roasts, and sells his own coffee yet still loses out to the Starbucks of the world, who claim to have close relationships with coffee farmers, yet rely on "hype" to sell their coffee. If people really cared about coffee farmers, he reasons, they would avoid the flashy brands altogether, because farmers barely participate in their business.

Javier, on the other hand, locates the problems in the coffee trade at the most immediate level. He would like to see a better enforcement of contracts in Honduras,



and a less corrupt legal system, so that he would not have to deal only with the small circle of people whom he trusts. He sees the structure of the coffee industry as being inherently unequal and risky, but there is nothing "unfair" about it.

The term "fair trade" assumes that the exchange conforms to normative standards of justice. In contemporary society, profit in itself is not considered immoral, but extreme cases of exploitation are (Foley 2003). The standards of just and unjust profit are ambiguous. There are clear cases of exploitation--such as child labor and slave labor--but outside of these extremes, there is no uniform opinion on what constitutes fair labor practices. Normative standards and legal standards may overlap, but they are not the same (Bell 1996:284-285). As these descriptions illustrate, normative standards of fairness are based upon particular cultural values and a person's place within the global division of labor. The coffee pickers that work on Tony's farm see him as an exploitative outsider, and blame their low wages on his greed. They direct their anger at Tony, but he is basically powerless to change the system.

### **Conclusion: Justice at a Price**

Over the course of this study, I spoke with many fair trade consumers who expressed a sentiment that rang true to my own experiences as an occasional fair trade buyer. Consumers recognized the great inequalities inherent in global capitalist markets, but didn't really know any way to ameliorate them. They realized that fair trade was only a small symbolic step in the right direction, but it felt good and had a simple philosophy that seemed to produce tangible benefits. It did not solve the problem of global inequality, but it surely didn't add to it.

The main argument of this essay is that "fair trade" is a basically private act that has no adequate political platform to address systemic inequalities. It is a movement without a guiding theory. The desire to know the conditions under which one's food is produced is a result of the alienating aspects of life in the post-industrial world, and the direct producer/consumer narrative upon which "fair trade" depends is a mythic construction that simply explains the incredibly complex nature of the global economy with a reassuring image of the coffee farmer, living a life of rustic tranquility. Like all myths, it provides a coherent yet simple explanation of social reality, and much of meaning comes "in the telling" or, in this case, "in the buying, brewing, and drinking." Buying fair trade gives the consumer a reassuring--even empowering--feeling of control over the seemingly incomprehensible system.

I described the cases of Javier and Tony to provide a sense of the complexity of the global coffee trade, which is dominated by transnational corporations that are themselves beholden to large-scale investors and commodities hedge funds. Fair trade's efforts to pay coffee farmers a bit more money is a pragmatic, local-level solution, but it makes no attempt to grasp the system at its highest levels. Its version of "social justice" is too simple to truly "re-embed" exchange in social relations. Like the narratives of exploitation developed by the workers on Tony's farm, or Tony, or Javier, this concept of "fairness" is based upon a limited perspective, that locates social problems and their possible resolutions at an immediate level.

For almost a century, nation-states developed various protectionist measures and international alliances to regulate coffee. This political process culminated with the institution of the International Coffee Agreement, which regulated coffee prices for

almost thirty years, from 1962 to 1989. The ICA involved stakeholders from all aspects of the coffee trade in its organization, which allowed it to grasp the industry at a systemic level. The ICA's demise was largely due to the fact that its most powerful member states placed their own national political interests over the interests of the industry as a whole, and it became dominated by internal conflicts and the hegemonic interests of the two largest coffee-producing nations, Brazil and Colombia (Bates 1997). Additionally, the centralized marketing boards that controlled the coffee trade in many countries were beset by corruption and inefficiency. The most notorious examples of coffee rentierism were in Zaire (Talbot 1997:77) and Uganda (Bates 1997:167), where the government paid coffee farmers a fraction of the international coffee price and used the surplus to enrich themselves. The ICA was far from perfect, but as Robert Bates has convincingly argued, it did provide a relatively effective system of international regulation for several decades.

In contrast, the most recent International Coffee Agreements, signed in 1994 and 2001, have turned away from the entire regulatory project that guided the first ICA. The International Coffee Organization, mandated by the second International Coffee Agreement, provides statistical information about the industry, promotes coffee consumption, and formulates strategies for farmer competitiveness. It is designed to stimulate and streamline the coffee trade according to free-market principles, but it has no regulatory power at all. In its wake, "fair trade" consumers attempt to regulate the coffee market by choice.

Here, it is useful to return to Talbot's (1997) study of the production and retention of surplus value in the global coffee commodity chain. Talbot has shown that the major consequence of the cessation of the International Coffee Agreement was a transfer of

income from coffee producing countries to consuming countries. Five transnational corporations control over 60% of the world coffee market (Talbot 1995:120). These companies, Nestle Foods, Procter and Gamble, Kraft (Altria/Phillip Morris), Coca Cola, and Sara Lee, have seen their share of the total surplus created along the coffee commodity chain rise by about 20% since the end of the International Coffee Agreement, while the share of the surplus retained in the producing countries has fallen. Talbot concludes that the collapse of the ICA led to a "huge transfer of surplus out of the producing countries" towards transnational corporations (86). But Talbot's analysis does not attempt to explain how the profits of the transnational corporations are used. More than half of the outstanding shares of stock of Procter and Gamble, Sara Lee, and Altria are owned by financial institutions (as much as 73% in the case of Altria), which include mutual funds and private capital funds. The dividends created by growing profits are concentrated in large banks and brokerage firms. A tiny percentage of this income may wind up in the hands of small individual investors, but this is insignificant compared to the profits of the financial companies. The key point is that any theory of fair or unfair forms of exchange must account for the financialization of the economy, but this aspect of the commodity chain is mystifying to most consumers, and does not play a part in contemporary theories of just and unjust profit.

The universalist version of the social contract that guides "fair trade" suggests great potential for a form of transnational (as opposed to international) regulation of the coffee trade that might be able to avoid the flaws of international cartels, but it provides no coherent vision of what would such an institution look like. In fact, proponents of fair trade almost never acknowledge the existence of the ICA, and tend to downplay the fact they are performing a similar regulatory function. Not one

promotional flyer or information packet on fair trade mentions the existence of the ICA, or the fact that it collapsed at the same time that fair trade began to grow in popularity.

The tendency to rely on private action to address systemic concerns derives from the incredibly complex and fragmentary nature of the contemporary global division of labor. In the absence of a viable theory of how post-industrial capitalism works, individual solutions become the best available option for change. The rising concern over transnational labor issues, expressed by advocates of fair trade, demonstrates the popular potential for the formation of new social bonds between international producers and consumers. Unfortunately, this potential has been focused on private consumer behavior rather than governmental strategies, such as trade or labor policy. Consumers do not have a guiding theory to support their political agenda, and therefore resort to marketing campaigns, mass protests, or market decisions to give voice to their cause. They embrace a symbolic opposition to neoliberalism, but provide no alternatives other than individual acts. To be clear, I am not taking the absolutist position that small steps are not worth taking; nor am I espousing a totalizing solution to the injustices of capitalism. However, I do believe that the contradiction that limits the potential of fair trade--recognition of an expansive global economy that can only be managed at the individual level--is characteristic of more general tendencies of contemporary social theory and political practice.

## **Conclusion**

### **Global Sociality and the Politics of the Particular**

Migration, religious change, and fair trade coffee production/exchange are three ways that people in La Quebrada responded to ongoing economic and social crisis between 2001 and 2003. The proximate cause of the crisis was a severe decline in world coffee prices, but its effects were exacerbated by a long-term process of depoliticization that had weakened the political power of the Honduran rural sector. La Quebrada was on shaky ground before the coffee crisis, due to the ongoing effects of structural adjustment and many other historical factors, but coffee's decline was the "trigger" that brought the community to the brink of collapse. The strategies that various groups developed to cope with this crisis are based upon a particular, historically contingent understanding of the social world that I have tried to understand and explain in this work.

These three responses to crisis exemplify the postmodern tendency to view individual choice as the basic engine of social change and to ignore or downplay political philosophies that reach beyond the individual. I call these movements "postmodern" because they recognize the individual's participation in an expansive global society, but locate the source of the potential transformation of that society at the most personal level. As I argued in Chapter 6, modernity has been based upon an ever-expanding concept of the social whole and a belief in the possibility of true popular sovereignty, conceived differently by various political philosophies. The key contradictory tendency of postmodernism is the recognition the existence of a single "global" society without any adequate "global" theory or political platform to regulate or transform society, beyond the logic of the market. Under these conditions, the logic

of the market, individual choice, becomes the basic organizing principle of social life. Even movements that try to assert coherent principles of sociality, such as new religious movements and fair trade, ultimately reflect this essentially individualist ethos, albeit in vastly different ways.

In each of the cases I have described, people attempt to assert collective principles of sociality or justice. People in La Quebrada struggle with social disintegration caused by transnational migration and try to articulate principles of sociality through gossip and personal accusation. They blame individual migrants for their community's crisis. The evangelicals try to counter social disintegration by cultivating adherents' personal relationship with god. Their solutions to social ills are based on individual moral conduct. Fair trade tries to regulate the global coffee industry through consumer choice, enforcing principles of economic and social justice through individual acts of consumption. In all of these cases, collective social projects are framed as the consequences of individual choices. When viewed in historical context, the narrow ideology upon which these practices rest is clear. In each case, the declining importance of the nation-state as a category of social identification reverberates through various domains of social life. The key theoretical question is: What has caused the narrowing basis of social identification and the politics of particularity? And, why has it occurred at the historical moment when the world is becoming more integrated--socially, culturally, and economically--than ever?

One way to understand the origins of depoliticized postmodernity focuses on the particular history of Honduras. The violence of the seventies and eighties foreclosed most secular and religious platforms for change that focused on "society" and could therefore be linked to socialism. Specific actors--supported by the CIA--fostered the

growth of Evangelical religion as an ideological counterweight to Marxism in the 1980s. Despite their questionable origins, new churches offered many tangible, realistic benefits for rural people at a time of great insecurity and crisis, and they have outgrown their early association with the U.S. military. The breakdown of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in 1989, and the more sweeping structural adjustment platform of which it was a part, led to great economic instability in La Quebrada. In the years that followed, communications and travel became cheaper and easier, the U.S. economy prospered, and migration presented an attractive alternative to coffee farming. The post-ICA turmoil and the damage caused by Hurricane Mitch added to the appeal of migration, which offered socioeconomic rebirth, and contributed to the growth of the new religious movements, which offered spiritual rebirth. By the time the most recent coffee crisis hit in 2000, migration was perceived as the most viable "way out" for many people, and the Honduran government basically agreed, viewing migrant remittances as a short-term resource that would benefit the poor and inject badly-needed *dólares* into the struggling economy.

The imprint of all of these experiences lives on in the memories of people in La Quebrada and certainly shapes their perceptions and actions. Given the turmoil of the past fifty years, there is good reason why this historical process has precipitated a culture of individualism and politically resigned pragmatism. Similar processes of depoliticization have been observed around the world since the end of the Cold War. When participation in collective political movements puts people at risk of imprisonment, torture, or death, these movements will tend to wither away. Given the history of corruption and false promises that has marked recent Honduran political history, people have turned to other philosophies that offer more pragmatic solutions



at the individual or local level. The story of Prudencio Flores, presented in Chapter 4, is an instructive case in point.

This explanation of cultural change focuses on how historical experience informs the present-day activity of people in La Quebrada. It explains the demise of collective politics by focusing on the cultural meaning of political participation in a specific context. However, it fails to capture the systemic nature of the changes observed in La Quebrada. After all, this pattern has been found all over the world, not only in places that directly experienced Cold War violence. In addition, the failures of previous eras of statist democratic development or Marxism do not *necessarily* lead to the rise of their depoliticized opposites, though in reality this has tended to be the case. Under different conditions, the new economic and social bonds formed through globalization could just as likely have produced some sort of transnational secular challenge, rather than the narrowly-oriented movements that have actually emerged. Why has economic integration systematically led to ideological involution, rather than a trend towards reinvigorated international governance or some other platform for transnational regulation of the international economy akin to a global New Deal?

At this point, I must return to the theoretical questions that I posed at the beginning of this work: How do we best understand the relationship between the economic and cultural dimensions of globalization? The combination of socioeconomic integration and cultural/political involution is too widespread to be explained only by an analysis of particular cases. We must look at these processes from a macro-structural perspective.

The rhetoric of globalization is based upon the idea that we live in a single global society organized by the market, in which states should basically enforce the basic laws that enable markets to function, such as financial transparency and protection of property rights. At the same time, the logic of consumer choice has underlain the ideology of globalization since its very beginnings. Recall that Theodore Levitt, a prominent management scholar, coined the term "globalization" in 1983 in an article that boldly proclaimed that, "Companies must learn to operate as if the world were one large market--ignoring superficial regional and national differences" (1983:92). Levitt's basic point was that multinational companies could succeed by using mass marketing to homogenize consumer tastes around the globe. The drive for expanded corporate profits that drove the process of globalization from its beginnings during the recession of the late-seventies/early-eighties has been lost in the shuffle, and the global spread of Western products now tends to be seen as a natural (and neutral) historical consequence of technological integration, giving people what they already want (Applebaum 2000).

Economic postmodernity acknowledges an integrated global whole, but the collective institutions that mediate between individuals and the market are somehow abstracted, leaving only individuals *qua* consumers, as agents of transformation. As the case of fair trade demonstrates, even people who seek to regulate the market try to do so through an imagined "direct" producer/consumer connection that ignores mediating institutions--such as nation-states. This is the economic analogue of the process of "ideological involution." The declining power of the nation-state has led to a belief in the power of the autonomous individual, rather than the creation of more expansive social collectivities.

Here, the analysis of globalization by Duménil and Lévy (2004) is particularly useful. They analyze the rise of globalization as the project of a particular class-fragment, finance, that managed to achieve political hegemony in the late-seventies and early-eighties. Their interpretation basically traces the origins of neoliberalism back to a single day, October 6, 1979, which serves as something like the Eighteenth Brumaire of financial capital. On that day, the Federal Reserve Bank of the United States radically changed its policies in an effort to curb long-term inflation and low real interest rates that had led to a crisis in profitability for financial companies. Rising wages had led to high rates of inflation in many of the core countries, and finance was losing profits due to low (in some cases, negative) real interest rates. According to Duménil and Lévy, the so-called "coup of 1979" allowed finance to overcome a structural crisis that had led to declining profit rates through the seventies. In their decision to fight inflation by "shock therapy," the Federal Reserve basically re-established the hegemony of finance that had existed during the nineteenth century but had weakened through much of the twentieth due to Keynesian policies designed to promote full employment and social stability.

The virtue of Duménil and Lévy's analysis is that it views one aspect of contemporary globalization--the liberalization of financial markets and the subsequent drive to decrease the role of the state in order to fight inflation--as the project of a particular class, enabled by purposeful political decisions that could be potentially transformed or undone under the right conditions. In this respect, they agree with Terence Turner, who has written:

Concerted action by states remains the most likely basis for the imposition of a new global order, capable of regulating financial and corporate capital for social and political ends. This would take a concerted political movement that could re-take control of state-policy making from the current neoliberal hegemony. This, in turn,

would require a more coherent social and political vision than the current array of NSMs and fragmented oppositional movements (including working class organizations) have thus far been able to produce (Turner 2002:79).

I agree with Turner on this point, but must emphasize that the renewed role of the state in management of the global economy does not require a return to economic nationalism. I appreciate the incredible potential that economic integration holds for both the developed and developing countries. However, globalization, as presently constituted, has overwhelmingly benefited a small class of financial elites at the expense of the majority. The great political challenge of the contemporary world is to apply the principles of social equity that guided modernist policies at the national level to the transnational realities of globalization. The only way to do this is through the coordinated involvement of nation-states.

Throughout this work, I have shifted back and forth from the micro-level (individual biographies) to abstract theoretical topics. Most of the ethnographic profiles highlight processes of global sociocultural integration in La Quebrada: From Santos Orellana, the man who used an internet phone to call a Long Island deli from Honduras looking for work, to Tony Chan, the Taiwanese-immigrant coffee farmer who roasts his coffee at JFK Airport, to the members of Creciendo en Gracia who huddle together in a small, dusty room at night to watch their apostle give sermons over the internet from Miami, all of these stories demonstrate that we are truly living in a uniquely interconnected world in which space and place take on new meanings. I greatly value the work of anthropologists of globalization who have studied "global flows" like these in order to elucidate the complexities of the contemporary world. At the same time, I have tried to describe common features of these phenomena and their origins in

concrete social processes. I do not claim to have developed an all-encompassing theory of the structure of global society, but I have argued for the need for such a theory, and suggested some preliminary steps in that direction.

I have suggested that the recognition of an integrated global whole with no consequent theory of its form or function is a basic contradiction of postmodernity. This same contradiction underlies much of the contemporary anthropology of the local and the global. If globalization is truly a "system of interconnections," then that system must have some structure and governing logic beyond "movement" itself. The negation of older theories of the global economy has occurred for understandable and pragmatic reasons, but it is not inevitable. Without new theory, the term "globalization" will continue to be met with skepticism.

In their de-emphasis of the mediating role of the state and the celebration of the individual, critics of globalization are following intellectual currents that are found on both the left and right. On the right and center, proponents of market liberalization have seen states as perpetuators of a static, inefficient, bureaucracy that can be slimmed down through privatization and liberalization. The view of the state as an ossified obstacle to capitalist growth fueled the "privatization" boom that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. In Latin America, this philosophy guided most the structural adjustment programs developed by the IMF in the nineties, and continues to guide most economic policy.

On the left, post-1968 intellectuals have tended to see the state as an agent of oppression, following in the tradition of Foucault. "State power" is seen as a controlling, dehumanizing, violent, force from which people cannot escape, but can

only "resist" to a limited degree. "The" state infiltrates every aspect of life to further its own power. More recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have tried to develop a collective political platform to reform the global economy, synthesizing the Foucaultian celebration of "resistance" with a more optimistic Marxian belief in the power of the populace to collectively reform society. But Hardt and Negri explicitly deny the power of states to act in the interest of national societies, arguing that new "multitudinous" social formations must develop in the place of modern nation-states for true reform to take place (Hardt and Negri 2004:222-227). They see the source of potential reform in "the common" a transnational group linked through technology and shared participation in a global sociocultural whole. From a different perspective, also on the left, David Graeber (2001) has argued in favor of anarchism, the establishment of new social bonds outside of authoritarian state structures.

I believe that the state can and should play a role in managing globalization in the interest of a broader segment of the populace. For example, one of the most obvious ways to combine economic integration with social equity is immigration reform. Globalization will remain a one-sided affair until people are able to relocate legally, along with their families, with the same ease enjoyed by capital. Immigration reform is one way that governments can live up to the "borderless world" rhetoric of globalization. One way to accomplish this would be through the WTO, which should require immigration reform as a precondition for countries to enter into bilateral free trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA. Additionally, individual states should increase immigration quotas in accordance with the estimated number of undocumented immigrants already living within their borders, and provide legal citizenship to non-criminal immigrants. These are not revolutionary suggestions; they are merely two examples of political initiatives that could have a broad impact. More

importantly, immigration is an issue that draws popular attention to the gulf between the ideology of free markets and the ways that actual markets function. This issue highlights the ideological aspects of contemporary globalization.

As a more general goal, governments must not lose sight of the place of the economy within the total process of social production. Although capital may be "deterritorialized," and therefore able to relocate with ease, this process comes at a tremendous social cost for people. La Quebrada exemplifies the type of social disintegration that occurs when people have to be separated from families and communities in order to earn a decent wage. The care and education of children and the elderly, the integration of families into broader communities, and the maintenance of some form of collective life cannot be sustained in a totally deterritorialized economic system. The constant search for increased profit and efficiency that drives the movement of capital comes at a tremendous cost for society.

In La Quebrada, the social costs of migration are just beginning to appear. I noticed a palpable sense of anger and frustration among young people who depended on their parents' remittances for their survival. They felt no bond with Honduras, knowing that their absent parents left the country to earn a decent wage, and that the government had no real platform for rural development beyond migrant dependency. Yet these young people had great animosity towards the United States as well, knowing that US immigration laws kept them separated from their parents, and prevented them from accessing the economic opportunities for which they longed. In most cases, these people just plodded along, hoping to save the money to go to the U.S. with a sense of bitter detachment. When these young people mature, they will have to migrate in order to support their own children. If they cannot, the stage will be set for growing

popular resentment and hostility, unless some political platform is developed to provide some sense of optimism and hope for rural Hondurans. Honduras was, to a certain extent, able to avoid the revolutionary violence that plagued its neighbors in the eighties, due to policies that attempted to integrate rural society into the national community, such as agrarian reform. Although the modernist reform projects did not achieve their lofty goals, they were, at least, based upon a philosophy that believed in the potential for people to collectively change society and provided people with a limited sense of optimism. The failure of the modernist project must not lead to a rejection of its guiding spirit. Instead, we must learn from previous mistakes so that they are not repeated.



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